

**Interwar Politics in a French Border Region:
the Moselle in the period of the Popular Front,
1934-1938**

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Declaration

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Abstract

Between 1934 and 1936 various organisations of the French left joined forces to create the Popular Front, an alliance borne of an antifascist imperative. After winning the May 1936 legislative elections, and in a climate of growing opposition from conservative and far right forces, the left-wing coalition came to power. By the end of 1938, the Popular Front had collapsed and the right was back in power. During this period (1934-1938), the right and far right repeatedly challenged the left-wing alliance's legitimacy and attacked its constituent political parties. This conflict between left and right intensified France's political and social tensions and polarised French politics and French society into supporters and opponents of the Popular Front.

This thesis examines the role of the right within the context of the Popular Front and seeks to answer the following question: how did the right act in response to the Popular Front between 1934 and 1938? The thesis focuses on the Moselle, a border *département* returned to French sovereignty after forty-seven years under German domination (1871-1918). By 1934, the Moselle had developed a distinctive political character sympathetic to the right and hostile, or at best indifferent, to the left. By drawing parallels between Parisian and Mosellan events and using new archival material, the thesis demonstrates the originality of the Popular Front in the Moselle, and the responses of the local, and essentially Catholic and particularist, right. No scholarly work has yet examined the conflict between the right and the left within the context of the Popular Front in the Moselle. This thesis demonstrates how the *département's* distinctive historical, social, linguistic, cultural, political and religious context shaped the Popular Front and the right's responses to it.

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Abbreviations

Political and social organisations

CGT Confédération générale du travail

CGTU Confédération générale du travail unitaire

PCF Section française de l'internationale communiste (French Communist party)

Radicals/Radical-Socialists Parti républicain, radical et radical-socialiste

SFIO Section française de l'internationale ouvrière (French Socialist party)

Archives

ADBR Archives Départementales du Bas-Rhin

ADM Archives Départementales de la Moselle

ADSSD Archives Départementales de la Seine Saint-Denis

AN Archives Nationales de France

APPP Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris

ASCOMEMO Association pour la Conservation de la Mémoire de la Moselle

CHSPo Centre d'Histoire de Sciences Politiques

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Introduction

In the 1890s, Raymond Poincaré, the French Minister for Public Instruction and a leading representative of the French right, visited a school in Commercy in western Lorraine. In his speech at the end of his visit, Poincaré, who originated from that corner of France, stated, '*Ce n'est pas ... sous le ciel de Lorraine que pouvaient germer et fleurir les doctrines vénéneuses et internationalistes.*'¹ At the time of this declaration, a border separated the historic region of Lorraine between two separate political entities. By moving parts of eastern Lorraine from French to German sovereignty, the treaty of Frankfurt of May 1871, ending the Franco-Prussian war, gave a political meaning to what had hitherto been only a linguistic reality: the division of Lorraine between the *Lorraine française*, which was largely Francophone, and the *Lorraine allemande* where French speakers cohabited amidst German and dialect speakers.² The latter, which is the subject of this thesis and which the Germans called Lothringen, changed sovereignty five times between 1870 and 1945: firstly, in 1871, when France ceded Alsace and parts of eastern Lorraine to Germany; secondly, after the Great War, when the French recovered the provinces and the territory of Lothringen became the Moselle *département*; thirdly, in July 1940 with the *de facto* annexation of the provinces into the Third Reich; and lastly, when France recovered the territories from Germany in May 1945.

Though Poincaré's speech was made during a trip to French Lorraine, his declaration could well have been made in Lothringen, German Lorraine. There, left-wing internationalist political groups struggled to mobilise the growing number of blue-collar workers that accompanied the region's mass industrialisation in the 1890s. By the time Lothringen returned to France and became the Moselle *département* in 1919, the region had become largely conservative, clerical and practically immune to '*les doctrines vénéneuses et internationalistes*', as Poincaré

¹ Serge Bonnet, *Sociologie Politique et Religieuse de la Lorraine*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1972, p.19.

² Though the term *Lorraine allemande* had been widely used to describe the dialect and German-speaking area of eastern and southern Lorraine, it took a different meaning after the region became German in 1871.

asserted. The political party that represented the conservatism of the region was the Union Républicaine Lorraine, a party created by local clergymen, politicians and influential notables in March 1919. During the years of the Moselle's annexation to Germany's Second Empire, Catholics and the clergy organised politically and created two parties: the Elsass-Lothringisches Zentrum and the Bloc Lorrain. The Elsass-Lothringisches Zentrum was particularly popular in the Germanic zone in the east and south-east as well as Alsace, while the Bloc Lorrain found most of its supporters in the Francophone zone in western Lothringen. The two parties gathered politicians from various socio-economic backgrounds including businessmen, lawyers, clergymen, farmers, and engineers, railway workers, while continuing to share one common principle: the defence of the Catholic Church's doctrine in the temporal world. Additionally, they rejected interference from Germany's Catholic party, the Zentrum, and defended the region's cultural and religious distinctiveness by mobilising the population against German assimilation.

The Union Républicaine Lorraine, which largely dominated interwar politics, was their direct political heir and developed a closely similar agenda until Germany annexed the Moselle in July 1940. This dual German and French heritage pervaded the Catholic right as well as the Mosellan left. Between 1871 and 1918, the German Socialist party, the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), tried to establish roots in the Moselle. Though it was particularly active in the region's industrial centres, a series of factors, examined in chapter One, prevented the SPD from establishing itself successfully in the region. The local section of the SPD focused largely on challenging the German annexation of the provinces and developed, much like the Union Républicaine Lorraine's political ancestors, a particularist political culture that rejected the German central power as well as the ascendancy of the SPD on the grounds that it was German. After the war, the French Socialist Party, then formally known as the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO), enjoyed some success in Alsace, the other region that alternated between France and Germany, but it remained feeble in the Moselle *département*. As Alison Carrol has noted in her study of Socialism in interwar Alsace, 'In Alsace they enjoyed a considerable proportion of the vote in

the legislative elections, as well as significant municipal success, yet in the Moselle the Socialists had limited presence.³ Meanwhile, the local section of the French Communist party (PCF) continued the pre-war tradition of particularism, rejecting French imperialism on the grounds of economic and national oppression and maintaining difficult relations with the party's national Central Committee.

By the mid-1930s, the period which is the chief focus of this thesis, France experienced a grave economic, social and political crisis. Though the Great Depression affected France more gradually than Britain or Germany, it took longer for France to recover from it.⁴ The effect of the crisis on French domestic politics and society was evident: not only did it exacerbate the anti-democratic current which had been present in French politics since the early years of the Third Republic and was embodied in the right-wing paramilitary *ligues*, it also contributed to tensions between conservatives and progressive forces. These tensions reached a climax, when, on 6 February 1934, thousands of protesters, mostly right-wing, took to the streets of Paris to demonstrate against the government. The demonstrations, which occurred near the buildings of the French National Assembly, led to bloody riots between protesters and police forces leaving seventeen dead and hundreds injured.⁵ For most contemporaries on the centre and left, the riots were nothing short of an attempted fascist coup against the Republic. Determined to protect the Republic against the fascist threat, the two parties of the left, the SFIO and the PCF, joined the main centrist party, the Radical-Socialists (Radicals), in a Popular Front which won the 1936 legislative elections. By the time the new Popular Front government took office in June, the country was paralysed by a nation-wide strike movement.

The conviction that the Popular Front's recent electoral victory and the strikes presaged an imminent Communist revolution in France had the effect of

³ Alison Carrol, 'The SFIO and National Integration: Regional Socialism and National Identity in Interwar Alsace', unpublished PhD thesis, Exeter University, 2008, p.17.

⁴ See Julian Jackson, *The Politics of Depression in France, 1932-1936*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

⁵ Chambre des Députés, *Rapport Général fait au nom de la commission d'enquête chargée de rechercher les causes et les origines des événements du 6 février 1934*, Tome 1 Paris: Imprimerie de la Chambre des Députés, 1934, p.226.

radicalising the political right, which sought, albeit unsuccessfully, to unite its forces against the 'reds'. At the same time, as a consequence of the Popular Front's ban on paramilitary *ligues*, new right-wing parties emerged. These new parties, and in particular the Parti Social Français, challenged the older right-wing parties by competing with them for the support of the conservative masses. By attacking both the left and the right, they also shifted the historic left-right axis on which the French political model rested further to the right. This thesis is a study of the right in the Moselle within the context of the Popular Front. Its aim is to investigate how local right wingers, whose political culture differed from that of the national right, viewed and reacted to the formation, victory and downfall of the Popular Front and how they organised at the local level. By comparing the right's responses nationally and locally with those of the left, the thesis examines how political groups who stood for the preservation of the established social order reacted to the social and political changes introduced by the Popular Front.

The Popular Front represented a decisive period for both the Mosellan right and left, which struggled to adapt to France's political culture for most of the interwar period. While the right-wing Catholic Union Républicaine Lorraine campaigned for a gradual and partial assimilation into the Republic that took into account the *département's* particularity such as the place of the Catholic faith in society, the regional federation of the PCF until 1935 insisted upon the creation of an independent state of Alsace-Lorraine. The position of the Mosellan section of the SFIO was somewhat more ambiguous and revealed its dual German-French heritage: it campaigned for assimilation on the grounds of national unity, but supported bilingualism and confessional schools because of its roots in German social democracy. The autonomist Heimatbund, which emerged in the mid-1920s and which found far less resonance in the Moselle than in Alsace, crossed party divisions and threatened the unity of both the Union Républicaine Lorraine and the PCF. Organisations *de l'Intérieur* – the term used by Mosellans and Alsations to describe anything and anyone originating in France beyond the Moselle or Alsace – such as the Action Française and the Croix de Feu - did not represent a serious threat to indigenous political formations in the Moselle until the electoral victory of the Popular Front in 1936. After the latter won the national legislative elections,

however, the Moselle's political character underwent a radical change. New parties *de l'Intérieur* emerged and proved successful in mobilising the local population into political action against the common enemy, Communism. The shift became even more apparent when the left-wing coalition disbanded in late 1938. By then, local political parties followed the national left-right divide, and the issue of assimilation and regional particularism, which had hitherto shaped local politics and society, lost momentum. The period of the Popular Front, which saw the culmination of the polarisation of French society and politics, thus accelerated the integration of the Moselle into France's political culture.

Historiographical review

Alsace-Lorraine has long been the focus of intense research by historians interested in the themes of borderland, politics, language, regionalism, regional, national and transnational identity, nationalism and the relationship between the central state and the region. Since the provinces changed national sovereignty five times between 1870 and 1945, this interest is hardly surprising. By and large, contemporary authors tended to offer biased accounts of Alsace-Lorraine, either celebrating or condemning the provinces' change of national sovereignty. Their views were largely influenced by political and, even more, national allegiance.⁶ In contrast, the Moselle received almost no attention from scholars, who by and large considered it French or treated it as a mere extension of Alsace. There is also a

⁶ Some German authors justified the annexation of the two provinces by using language and culture: Georg Wolfram und Werner Gley, *Elsass-Lothringischer atlas: Landeskunde, Geschichte, Kultur und Wirtschaft Elsass-Lothringens, dargestellt auf 45 Kartenblättern mit 115 Haupt- und Nebenkarten*, Frankfurt Am Main: Selbstverlag des Elsass-Lothringen-Instituts, 1931. In his studies on pan-Germanists in Alsace-Lorraine, the French and Alsatian journalist Charles Beckenhaupt concluded that language was by no means a decisive factor in defining one's race; in Beckenhaupt, *Race, Langue ou Patrie?*, Strasbourg: Libraire Istra, 1930. Other French authors celebrated the return of the provinces to France by retorting that despite the use of German in some parts of the provinces, the latter belonged to the French nation. They put forward the Republican principle that one does not need to speak French to feel French. Frédéric Eccard, 'L'Alsace et la Lorraine sous le Commissariat Général et après sa suppression', *Revue politique et parlementaire*, novembre 1925, pp.197-237. See also Georges Weiss, *L'Alsace: problèmes actuels*, Paris: les Presses Universitaires de France, 1929. This is a deceiving title that hides the fact that the book also deals with the Moselle.

persistent popular perception in France that Alsace somehow shielded Lorraine under German rule.

Graphic or artistic depictions of Alsace-Lorraine produced between 1871 and 1940 tended to represent Alsace as the big sister of a somewhat more vulnerable Lorraine. For example, a poster to commemorate the two provinces printed during the Great War depicted Alsace as a self-confident character looking determinedly towards France with a fragile-looking Lorraine on her right side (Figure 1). While Alsace looks resolutely westwards, symbolising its desire to rejoin France, Lorraine looks downwards, an indication of its implicit dependence on Alsace.

Figure 1 Alsace and Lorraine looking towards France



Likewise, the statue erected in honour of the two provinces in Nancy shows a confident Alsace consoling a smaller sorrowful Lorraine. This statue, sculpted by French artist Paul Dubois, is part of a group of sculptures produced in the early 1900s, and carries the evocative title of *Le Souvenir* and *La Lorraine pleurant sur l'épaule de L'Alsace* (Figure 2).

Figure 2 *Le Souvenir* in Nancy



This popular perception might explain why until recently scholarship on Alsace-Lorraine has centred on Alsace and largely ignored Lorraine or the Moselle, thus obscuring the heterogeneous nature of the two provinces. More recently, however, scholars have acknowledged the differences between and among the component parts of the region. In his study on fascism in interwar Alsace, Samuel Goodfellow notes that,

[A]lthough Alsace-Lorraine has become a commonplace, the linking of the two provinces is, for the most part, arbitrary. The term Alsace-Lorraine did not originate until 1871 when the Germans annexed them. When the Germans rolled in again in 1940, the two were ... separated. In short, Lorraine was different.⁷

Similarly, in her unpublished thesis on interwar Alsace, Alison Carrol states that a new generation of scholars accepts the need to study Alsace and the Moselle as

⁷ Samuel H. Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine: Fascism in interwar Alsace*, DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999, p.163, n1.

separate regions. As she writes, 'This is a reflection of an increased recognition of the differences in the experience and development of the two [regions].'⁸

The most comprehensive work on the Moselle during the period of the *Reichsland Elsaß-Lothringen* – the official German term to describe Alsace-Lorraine between 1871 and 1918 - remains François Roth's published doctoral thesis *La Lorraine Annexée: Etude sur la Présidence de Lorraine*.⁹ Roth has written extensively on Lorraine and the Moselle between 1871 and 1940.¹⁰ While some of his studies are general accounts of politics, economics and society in the Moselle, others focus on particular events and local political figures.¹¹ More recently, Carolyn Grohman's doctoral thesis presents an impressive account of the difficulties faced by the French state and the local population during the early years of the reintegration of the Moselle into French sovereignty.¹² Joseph Schmauch's doctoral thesis, *Les services d'Alsace-Lorraine face à la Réintégration des Départements de l'Est (1914-1919)*, sheds light on the administrative bodies that organised the return of the 'chères provinces' to France and the problems arising from their assimilation into the French Republic.¹³

⁸ Carrol, *op.cit.*, p.36.

⁹ François Roth, *La Lorraine Annexée: Etude sur la Présidence de Lorraine (1870-1918)*, Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1976.

¹⁰ His works include *inter alia* *Les Lorrains entre France et l'Allemagne*, Metz: Editions Serpenoises, 1982 and *La Vie Politique en Lorraine au XXe siècle*, Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1986.

¹¹ Roth, *La Guerre de 70*, Paris: Fayard, 1990 and *Raymond Poincaré: un Homme d'Etat Républicain*, Paris: Fayard, 2000. His latest work is a biography, *Robert Schuman 1886-1963: du Lorrain des Frontières au Père de l'Europe*, Paris: Fayard, 2008. Roth focuses on Schuman's heritage as a Lorrainer and 'un homme des frontières' to explain his ability to develop his political career in France and in Europe.

¹² Carolyn Grohmann, 'The Problems of Integrating Annexed Lorraine into France, 1918-1925', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Stirling, 1999. From the same author, see also 'From Lothringen to Lorraine: Expulsion and Voluntary Repatriation', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 16, 3, September 2005, pp.571-587 and Paul Lawrence, Timothy Baycroft and Grohmann, 'Degrees of Foreignness and the Construction of Identity in French Border Regions during the Interwar Period', *Contemporary European History*, 10, 1, January 2001, pp. 51-71. Laird Boswell's 'From Liberation to Purge Trials in the "Mythic Provinces": the Reconfiguration of Identities in Alsace and Lorraine, 1918-1920' *French Historical Studies*, 23, Winter 2000, pp.129-162 concentrates on both Alsace and Lorraine and provides a valuable complement to Grohmann's studies.

¹³ Unless stated otherwise, all the dissertations and doctoral theses cited here are unpublished. Joseph Schmauch, 'Les services d'Alsace-Lorraine face à la réintégration des départements de l'Est (1914-1919)', Ecole des Chartes, Sorbonne, 2004.

A few dissertations (*Mémoires de Maîtrise*) from the Université de Metz and the Université de Nancy address specific political issues in interwar Moselle. R.H. Kieffer's dissertation, *Les Elections Législatives de 1919 et 1924 en Moselle*, describes the first two legislative elections after the return of the Moselle to France. Based on archival sources at the Archives Départementales de la Moselle and local newspapers, Kieffer focuses on the population's electoral behaviour to demonstrate the *département's* conservative character.¹⁴ Jean-Daniel Durand's *Les Catholiques en Moselle, 1924-1926*, explores the resurgence of organised political Catholicism in the region in the wake of the French government's plans to introduce the Republic's secular laws in Alsace and the Moselle.¹⁵ Durand provides invaluable information on the events surrounding the radicalisation of political Catholicism in the Moselle in the 1920s, but largely omits the local socio-political context in the immediate post-war period. Other dissertations that have proved useful for this thesis include Valérie Mangenot's *Les Syndicats Ouvriers en Moselle de 1919 à 1934* and Didier Kompa's *La Formation du Front Populaire en Moselle, 1934-1936*.¹⁶ Though they provided an essential starting point for the present author's research, they approach their respective topics in a largely uncritical manner, which is normal in French dissertations.

Chantal Thiebaut's doctoral thesis, *La Moselle dans le Contexte Politique Lorrain 1919-1929*, offers a rich account of local politics in the post-war decade.¹⁷ By focusing on the results of the numerous local and national elections in the four *départements* of Lorraine (Moselle, Meurthe-et-Moselle, Meuse and Vosges), Thiebaut gives an overview of Mosellan politics within a wider regional context. Jean-François Colas's doctoral thesis uses the same geographical framework but

¹⁴ R.H. Kieffer, 'Les Elections Législatives de 1919 et 1924 en Moselle', Université de Nancy, 1967.

¹⁵ Jean-Daniel Durand, 'Les Catholiques en Moselle, 1924-1926: Rôle Politique et Défense du Statut Religieux et Scolaire', Université de Metz, 1993.

¹⁶ Valérie Mangenot, 'Les Syndicats Ouvriers en Moselle de 1919 à 1934', Université de Metz, 1995, Didier Kompa, 'La Formation du Front Populaire en Moselle, 1934-1936', Université de Metz, 1985. Other dissertations that examine issues relevant to this thesis include: Gerard Diwo, 'Le Communisme en Moselle, 1925-1932', Université de Metz, 1983 and Marc-Pierre Gontard, 'Le Francisme en Moselle, 1933-1936', Université de Metz, 1982.

¹⁷ Chantal Thiebaut, 'La Moselle dans le contexte Politique Lorrain de 1919 à 1929', Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1977.

concentrates his study on the right in the 1930s.¹⁸ By drawing parallels between the various rights (*les droites*) that existed in Lorraine, Colas highlights the Mosellan right's distinctiveness within a regional and national context, which he attributes to the *département's* past in the *Reischland*. Notwithstanding the quality of the works cited above, none of them devote attention to the central theme of this thesis: the relationship between the left and the right during the interwar period and the effect of the Popular Front on the right in a contested border region with particular cultural and linguistic conditions.

By comparison, literature on the French Popular Front is plentiful. By and large, scholarly studies of the Popular Front examine events at the national or Parisian levels.¹⁹ Similarly, those studies that focus on particular aspects of the Popular Front (its origins, its constituent political organisations, the strike movement and so on) more often than not do so in the national or international context. Two examples are Gerd-Rainer Horn's *European Socialists Respond to Fascism* and Helen Graham and Paul Preston's *The Popular Front in Europe*.²⁰ Because the Popular Front was a social, political and cultural movement, it offers many avenues of exploration. Julian Jackson's *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy 1934-1938*, which examines all three dimensions of the movement, remains an essential point of reference for any historian interested in the period.²¹ Though new sources have emerged on the PCF since the publication of the book, it offers a unique insight into the workings of the Communist party and its relationship with the Comintern.

¹⁸ Jean-François Colas, 'Les Droites Nationales en Lorraine dans les Années 30: acteurs, organisations, réseaux', Université de Paris X-Nanterre, 2002.

¹⁹ Jacques Kergoat, *La France du Front Populaire*, Paris: La Découverte, 1986, Serge Wolikow, *Le Front Populaire en France*, Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1996, Danielle Tartakowsky, *Le Front populaire, La vie est à nous*, Paris: Gallimard, 1996.

²⁰ Gerd-Rainer Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism: Ideology, Activism and Contingency in the 1930s*, New-York: Oxford University Press, 1996, Helen Graham and Paul Preston (eds.), *The Popular Front in Europe*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987. See also Martin S. Alexander and Helen Graham (eds.), *The French and Spanish Popular Fronts: Comparative Perspectives*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

²¹ Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy 1934-1938*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the Popular Front seemed to fall out of fashion among historians. But with the restitution of some of the PCF's archives from Moscow and the recent commemoration in France of the Popular Front's seventieth anniversary, the subject has received renewed attention.²² A number of local studies of the Popular Front have appeared, including Michel Brot's *Le Front Populaire dans les Alpes-Maritimes*, as well as the numerous dissertations on the subject, which inevitably vary in quality.²³ Brot underscores the distinctiveness of the Popular Front in the *département* of the Alpes-Maritimes where, as in the Moselle, most of the local economy belonged to a group of right-wing notables involved in politics. He demonstrates how, despite management's authoritarian style and resistance to left-wing social and political activism and the left's organisational and financial difficulties, tens of thousands of workers organised politically and participated in the national labour movement.

Considering the large concentration of blue-collar workers in the Moselle in the interwar period (60 percent of the Mosellan workforce worked in industry in 1931), the lack of interest in it among students of the Popular Front is surprising.²⁴ After all, similar concentrations of workers provided strong support for the forces of the left in other parts of France such as the coal-mining districts of the Nord or the Paris industrial suburbs, commonly known as the Paris red belt. The only two dissertations on the Popular Front in the Moselle are Kompa's *La Formation du*

²² Antoine Prost, *Autour du Front Populaire: Aspects du mouvement social au XXe siècle*, Paris: Seuil, 2006, Michel Margairaz et Danielle Tartakowsky, *L'Avenir Nous Appartient!: une histoire du Front populaire*, Paris: Larousse, 2006. The commemorations were often the product of local initiatives that reflect the city or region's link to the Popular Front and the left. Organisations such as the CGT and the PCF organised large events throughout France in 2006. In the Moselle, the CGT in partnership with the Archives Départementales de la Moselle and the Conseil Général de la Moselle organised a series of exhibitions and round tables on the Popular Front's legacy in the region.

²³ Michel Brot, *Le Front Populaire dans les Alpes-Maritimes*, Nice: Editions Serre, 1988. Other French 'border' regions that have been studied include *inter alia* Brittany (Benoit Kermaol, 'Colère ouvrière à la veille du Front populaire', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, juin 2006, p.28) and Marseille (Xavier Daumalin et Jean Domenichino, *Le Front populaire: Marseille et sa région*, Marseille: Jeanne Laffitte, 2006 and David A. L. Levy, 'From clientilism to communism: the Marseille working class and the Popular Front' in Alexander and Graham (eds.), *op.cit.*, pp.201-212.

²⁴ Statistique générale de la France, *Résultats statistiques du recensement général de la population effectué le 8 mars 1931*, Tome I, Troisième partie, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1933, p.13.

Front Populaire en Moselle (mentioned earlier) and Laurent Mousnier's study of the collective contracts in the Moselle in 1936-1938.²⁵ The latter provides essential information on the implementation of the collective contracts in the Moselle and the disagreements between the *patronat* and the workers' representatives. The most up-to-date archive-based work on the Popular Front in the *département* is contained in Philippe Wilmouth's *Front Lorrain contre Front Populaire* and Pierre Schill's *Visages et Figures du Front Populaire en Moselle*.²⁶ Notwithstanding the fact that neither is an academic study and both display a clear ideological bias in favour of the left, they effectively demonstrate that, despite popular belief, the Popular Front existed in the Moselle. Both authors also argue, no doubt correctly, that by instilling a generation of workers with a new political consciousness, the Popular Front planted the seeds of the future resistance movement that would fight German occupation forces between 1940 and 1945.

Studies of the right in the interwar period have been largely preoccupied with the ongoing debate over the definition of French fascism. René Rémond's *Droite en France de 1815 à nos jours*, which has been updated many times since its first publication in 1954, sparked the debate by categorising the French right into three different elements: *Légitimisme*, *Orléanisme* and *Bonapartisme*.²⁷ His theory posits that since the fall of Napoleon I's regime and the restoration of the monarchy in France in 1815, any right-wing movement or party can be fitted into one of these three '*droites*'. As he writes, '*C'est de ces trois traditions, d'inégale ancienneté et d'importance variable avec le temps, que la conjonction forme le faisceau appelé inexactement au singulier la droite française*'.²⁸ In maintaining that the paramilitary *ligues* that appeared in France at the turn of the century and reappeared in the interwar period belonged to the third category (*Bonapartisme*),

²⁵ Laurent Mousnier, 'Une Ere Nouvelle: pratiques et expériences mosellanes des conventions collectives de travail au temps du Front Populaire, 1936-1938', Université de Metz, 2005.

²⁶ Philippe Wilmouth, *Front Lorrain contre Front Populaire*, Knutange: Fensch Vallée, 2006, Pierre Schill, *Visages et Figures du Front Populaire en Moselle*, Metz: Editions Serpenoises, 2006.

²⁷ René Rémond, *Droite en France de 1815 à nos jours*, Paris: Aubier, 1954. *Bonapartistes* support a strong and centralised state modelled on Napoléon Bonaparte's First Empire (1804-1814). *Légitimistes* and *Orléanistes* are both Royalists: the first support the Bourbons who restored monarchy in 1814, the second support the Orléans who governed France between 1830 and 1848.

²⁸ Rémond, *Les Droites en France*, Paris: Aubier, 1982, p.37.

Rémond suggests that France was practically immune to fascism and that by extension the *ligues* were the expression of a longing for social conservatism and order. He accepts that fascism existed in France, but it was the work of marginal, revolutionary, therefore left-wing, elements. Several eminent scholars have published studies supporting Rémond.²⁹ But others have rejected his theory, claiming that by pigeon-holing the French *droites* into three well-defined traditions, Rémond radically understates the existence of fascism in France and ignores French conservatives' complicity with fascism which, as Robert Soucy writes, occurred 'when they believed that their social and economic interests were seriously threatened by the left.'³⁰

This thesis examines the right in only a single French region and does not attempt to assess whether it was fascistic. Instead, like Jessica Wardhaugh's recent publication on the representation of the people by the left and the right in the period of the Popular Front and Sean Kennedy's study of the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français, it assesses the nature and tactics of a section of the French political class and the extent to which local right-wingers were prepared to assimilate or reject national politics.³¹ In doing so, it examines the local right's origins and actions within a regional context in a period of particularly heightened social and political tensions. It offers corroboration of Rémond's argument that there were many *droites* in France – though the Mosellan Catholic right's ideological tradition did not fit comfortably into any of his three categories - but it also agrees with William Irvine and Kevin Passmore, two of Rémond's most persuasive opponents, that local right wingers collaborated with fascist or anti-parliamentarian movements which sought to establish, whether legally or not, a

²⁹ Studies that offer corroboration of Rémond's theories include Pierre Milza, *Fascisme français, passé et présent*, Paris: Flammarion, 1987 and Serge Berstein, *La France des années 30*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1988. Milza and Berstein have been on the editorial board of the publisher Hatier which publishes history school books. Thus, Milza and Berstein's theories have fed generations of French children.

³⁰ Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933-1919*, New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1995, pp.3-4.

³¹ Jessica Wardhaugh, *In Pursuit of the People, Political Culture in France, 1934-1939*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, Sean Kennedy, *Reconciling France against Democracy: the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1927-1945*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.

new regime in France.³² In the Moselle, these movements included the Action Française and the Jeunesses Patriotes in the 1920s and Francisme, Neue Front, the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français in the 1930s.

Despite the fact that right-wing Catholicism and movements such as Francisme and the Parti Social Français were particularly active in the Moselle, there is no in-depth scholarly study of the right in the *département*. Passmore acknowledges the lack of studies of right-wing movements in French regions; in his words, 'Little has been published on regional conservative politics'.³³ Goodfellow, in his study of fascism in interwar Alsace, explains the importance of studying regions that lie at cultural and linguistic crossroads. As he states, 'Alsace is a particularly useful region for the study of fascism because it is one of the few areas where different nationalist strands – French, German, and regional – met.'³⁴ Despite the fact that Alsace and the Moselle presented many similarities, the Moselle was nonetheless different from Alsace. Like Alsace, the Moselle was situated on the border of two great cultures and powers, but many Francophones in the *département* rejected Alsatian supremacy during the period of the Second Reich. This anti-Alsatianism was particularly evident among the Francophone notables who controlled the local press and the economy. Additionally, unlike in Alsace where the French-speaking elite was forced out of the Catholic Union Populaire Lorraine in the 1920s - a party which initially shared some common principles with the Union Républicaine Lorraine - Francophones dominated right-wing politics in the Moselle.

³² William D. Irvine, *French Conservatism in Crisis: the Republican Federation of France in the 1930s*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979, Kevin Passmore, *From liberalism to fascism, the right in a French province, 1928-1939*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. See also Passmore, 'Boy Scouting for grown-ups? Paramilitarism in the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français', *French Historical Studies*, 19, autumn 1995, pp.527-557. By examining the right in a French region (the Rhône) in the 1930s and the close and tense relationship between conservatives and far right organisations, these two works are particularly relevant to this thesis.

³³ Passmore, *From liberalism to fascism*, p.301.

³⁴ Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine*, p.3.

Primary sources

The main sources for this thesis are the records of the French administration between 1918 and 1938. Those documents are held in the Archives Départementales de la Moselle in Metz, the Archives Départementales du Bas-Rhin in Strasbourg and the Archives Nationales de France in Paris. The three archives hold a wide variety of records ranging from police reports, statistics and correspondence between local state representatives and the central government. The origins of those records reflect the various administrative bodies that managed the affairs of the recovered provinces in the interwar period.

After France recovered Alsace and Lorraine, it created various institutions to manage the provinces' reintegration into the state. In the Moselle, the *commissariat de la République* was established in Metz in 1919. It managed the transfer from German to French rule and subsequent *départemental* affairs; similar administrations were established in Strasbourg (Bas-Rhin) and Colmar (Haut-Rhin). The three *commissariats de la République* were under the authority of the Strasbourg-based *haut commissariat de la République*. Administrators such as the *Commissaire de la République de Metz* produced reports which were sent simultaneously to the offices of the Prime Minister in Paris and the *haut commissariat* in Strasbourg. The latter was replaced by the *direction générale des services d'Alsace et de Lorraine* in October 1925. Alongside the *direction générale*, whose offices were in the Grand Palais in Paris, the French government created three *préfectures départementales* in Metz, Strasbourg and Colmar. The suppression of Alsatian authority over the three *départements* increased Metz's autonomy vis-à-vis Strasbourg. At the same time, however, by placing the provinces under the responsibility of a Paris-based body close to the offices of other ministries, the national government ensured greater control of the provinces. The records of the *direction générale des services d'Alsace et de Lorraine* (98AL) located in the Archives Départementales du Bas-Rhin provided essential information that has been used widely in the thesis. This series is commonly known as *Fonds Valot*. Paul Valot was the *conseiller d'état* in charge of the *direction générale* from 1925 to 1941. This series holds records pertaining to

political organisations, trade unions, the press, strikes and other social and political activities in Alsace and the Moselle. Only 77 metres of the 194 metre-long *Fonds Valot* have so far been classified. The remaining 117 metres, though accessible to researchers, are in such a disorganised state that they have not been consulted.

The Archives Départementales de la Moselle hold various official records. The most relevant for the thesis is the series M (*Fonds de la préfecture*), which spans the period from 1925 to 1940 and includes police and prefectural reports on political organisations, the press, trade unions, demonstrations, strikes and elections. Given the *département's* history and France's troubled relations with Germany in the interwar period, particularly in the 1920s with the French occupation of the Ruhr and controversy over German war reparations, France kept a very close watch on political activity in the Moselle. In the immediate post-war period, reports focused on the activities of the Neutralists' movement and the short-lived Parti Fédéraliste as both demanded the creation of an independent state of Alsace-Lorraine. Later reports focused on the activities of the autonomist Heimatbund and the PCF. These reports are marked by an almost uniformly hostile tone towards the Autonomists and the Communists in particular; the latter were regularly described as '*terroristes*'. This reflects the fear of local *commissaires spéciaux* that Communists were separatists seeking the creation of a soviet republic of Alsace-Lorraine. The role of local Communist leaders in the German revolution of November 1918 (see chapter One) and the French administration's continuing suspicions of Communists also explains this hostility. The series Z covers reports from *commissaires spéciaux* and *sous-préfets*.

The Archives Nationales de France in Paris hold police records in the series F7 and documents pertaining to the administration of Alsace-Lorraine in the series AJ30. Records in the F7 series have been particularly useful in covering the gaps in the records held in Metz and Strasbourg; local archivists attribute the missing

reports to the German officials in charge of the archives between 1940 and 1945.³⁵ Because the Union Républicaine Lorraine did not leave any papers, it was particularly difficult to retrace its activities. But thanks to a *carton* held at the Archives Nationales (F7/14614), devoted to the Action Catholique Lorraine, it has been possible to reconstruct some of the history of the party. The Action Catholique Lorraine was a *départemental* association of Catholics which openly supported the Union Républicaine Lorraine. Its members included all the leaders of the Union Républicaine Lorraine, which provided the Catholic party with a useful platform. Its membership far surpassed that of any other organisation in the *département*. Under the heading BA, the Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris hold a wide collection of police records on political and social organisations, trade unions, demonstrations, strikes and politicians in the interwar period, all of which are highly relevant to this thesis. The records proved particularly helpful in their description of Parisian and national events such as the riots of 6 February 1934 and the activities of the national committee of the Popular Front.

Besides the Union Républicaine Lorraine, certain other key political organisations are largely missing from the archives. In particular, there is little information available on the local sections of the SFIO in the 1930s. This may be due to the fact that the Socialist party was a small organisation in the Moselle: barely 200 members in the mid-1930s and no more than 7 percent of the total vote at national elections (see chapter One). The Office Universitaire de Recherche Socialiste (OURS) holds the archives of the national SFIO, but there are practically no sources on the Moselle sections in the interwar period.³⁶ Sources on the Mosellan Radical-Socialists are even rarer. This is due to the fact that the party

³⁵ The investigations at the Archives Départementales de la Moselle and the Archives Départementales du Bas-Rhin reveal a consistent lack of information relating to left-wing political activities in late 1938. There are no official records of the events of 30 November 1938, a fateful date in the history of the Popular Front. The current location or existence of those records is not clear but it is possible that German authorities used them to identify local 'reds' after the annexation in July 1940. Those documents might have been destroyed during the war or might be in Moscow, where a number of French documents are still held.

³⁶ The Archives Nationales de France in Fontainebleau, whose collection of records starts in 1958, recently recovered some of the SFIO's papers previously kept in Moscow. The investigations conducted at those archives revealed that none of those papers were relevant to the thesis.

was quasi-inexistent in the Moselle and played a small part in the local committees of the Popular Front. Despite the party's efforts to establish some roots in the region of Thionville in the early 1920s, it was not until 1937 that its first section was created, in Dieuze, in the west of the *département*. At the 1936 elections, it managed to present only a single candidate for the whole *département*. Archival sources for the parties of the right are scarcely better. To circumvent this lack of information the author consulted the private papers of some of the national leaders.

The private papers of national party leaders consulted at the Archives Nationales in Paris include Léon Blum (570AP) from the SFIO who headed two Popular Front governments; Edouard Daladier (496AP) from the Radical-Socialists who engaged his party on the path of the Popular Front in 1935, and in 1938, as Prime Minister, ended his party's participation to the left-wing alliance; Maurice Thorez (626AP), the leader of the PCF. These papers provided an essential insight into developments at the national level, but offered little information at the *départemental* level. As the PCF was the driving force behind the Mosellan Popular Front, the party's papers held at the Archives Départementales de la Seine Saint-Denis in Bobigny provided precious information. The archives hold a large collection (3Mi6/1-44) of propaganda material, internal reports and correspondence between the party's central offices – including the Central Committee and the Politburo – and leaders in Alsace-Lorraine. The PCF papers in Bobigny are in microfilm form: the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI) based in Moscow has kept the original documents as well as almost 1,200 files pertaining to the PCF; the archives in Bobigny hold 865 files. The party's official publication, *Les Cahiers du Bolchévisme*, contained a large source of documents and articles relating to the regional section of the PCF and the party's position within the Popular Front.

Other private papers consulted at the Archives Nationales include those of Louis Marin (317AP), the leader of the right-wing Fédération Républicaine de France. Marin's party never had representatives or sections in the Moselle but his papers include private letters, party congresses reports and other documents that highlight the Fédération Républicaine's radicalisation against the left after 1934.

The papers of Alexandre Millerand (470AP) covering his position as *Haut-Commissaire de la République* in Strasbourg provided an overview of the difficulties the French faced in Alsace and the Moselle in the immediate post-war period. Surprisingly, it seems that scholars studying Alsace-Lorraine have never used the papers of Henri Cacaud (485AP), the *commissaire de la République* in Strasbourg between 1920 and 1924. Yet, they hold essential correspondence, reports and other official documents pertaining to various aspects of the reintegration of the provinces including the deportation of German nationals, detailed documents on the transfer of German-owned businesses, properties and bank accounts to the French, reports on the Autonomist movements in Alsace-Lorraine as well as in the Rhineland and the Saarland, two territories coveted by the French after 1918. At the Centre d'Histoire de Sciences Politiques in Paris, the author consulted the papers of François de la Rocque (LR), the leader of the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français, two organisations that played a significant role in interwar Moselle. The papers contain little information of activities at the local level but were nonetheless helpful in describing the activities of the two movements at the national level. Roger Genebrier, a close associate of Daladier in the 1930s – he became his personal secretary in 1938 – left a wide range of documents on the Popular Front, the Radical-Socialist party and the Munich crisis (GE). A variety of memoirs have also been consulted, though they provided little or no information at the local level.

In addition to public and private papers, the press provided a useful source of information. The regional press was found in the Archives Départementales de la Moselle, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and ASCOMEMO (Association pour la Conservation de la Mémoire de la Moselle), a history association based in Hagondange in the Moselle. The regional titles included right-wing political newspapers such as the Union Républicaine Lorraine's official dailies *Le Lorrain* and *Die Lothringer Volkszeitung* and the nationalist *Le Messin*; left-wing papers such as *Die Volkstribune* and the bilingual *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine*, which were local versions of the national communist paper *L'Humanité*, the short-lived Socialist *La Bataille* and various publications of the regional federations of France's two largest left-wing trade unions - the Confédération Générale du

Travail (CGT) and the Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire (CGTU) - such as *Der Hütten-Prolet* and *Le Travailleur de la Moselle*. The national and international press used in the thesis were consulted at various libraries in Paris and London.

There are a number of gaps and limitations in the sources for the thesis. Mosellan party leaders left no personal papers relevant to the thesis. Though the Archives du ministère des Affaires étrangères hold some of Robert Schuman's papers, they focus on his post-1945 career and provide no information on the interwar period. The same applies to the papers currently held at the Archives de la Maison Robert Schuman situated in Scy-Chazelles in the Moselle (series RS) and at the Archives Départementales de la Moselle (series 34J and 36J). The Catholic Church and the diocese of Metz played a significant political role in the Moselle but evidence is fragmentary. The author consulted the records of the bishopric of Metz (series 29J) and those of the Petit and Grand Séminaire de Metz (series 18J and 19J) at the Archives Départementales de la Moselle but neither provided information relevant to the thesis. Thus, the author relied on the local Catholic press and official police records consulted in Paris, Metz and Strasbourg.

The author was denied access to the de Wendel private papers held at the Archives Nationales in Paris (189AQ). These include the private papers of Guy de Wendel, a central figure of the Union Républicaine Lorraine and of the local *patronat*. Guy de Wendel occupied many political functions under the banner of the Union Républicaine Lorraine: deputy (1919-1927), senator (1928-1940) and president of the *départemental* assembly (1924-1936). The de Wendel family owned many factories and mines in the *département* including Les Petits-Fils de François de Wendel et Cie, run by Guy de Wendel, who also happened to be the cousin of François de Wendel, the Fédération Républicaine senator for the Meurthe-et-Moselle and *régent* of the Banque de France who became one of the prime targets of the Popular Front propaganda campaign against the *200 Familles* (see chapter Three).

In absence of access to the de Wendel papers and due to the lack of other private records for the *patronat*, the author sought the public records of the Chamber of Commerce of the Moselle. However most of the records pertaining to

the interwar period were lost during the Second World War. They were lost after the French moved them to Poitiers in western France in June 1940, the Germans having requisitioned the building housing the Chamber of Commerce in Metz. The Archives Départementales de la Moselle hold a limited number of records in the series 308M but they provided no information relevant to the thesis. The author consulted the records of the Comité des Forges, a professional organisation founded in 1864 to defend industrialists' interests, held at the Archives Nationales de France in Roubaix (series 62AS) but found no sources relevant to this study. The author also visited the Espace Archives located in Sérémaange-Erzange, the original birthplace of the de Wendel industrial and financial empire near Thionville, but apart from photographs of the 1936-1937 strikes and detailed records of the negotiations over the collective contracts in the industrial sector in 1936-1938, the archives provided no information. To understand the role of the *patronat* nationally, the author found Ingo Kolboom's *La Revanche des Patrons* and the national press particularly useful.³⁷

A brief section of the thesis discusses the history of the Moselle during the German Second Empire (see chapter One). The national archives in Koblenz hold a large collection of documents on the *Reichsland* including police reports on political organisations and the Catholic clergy. But since the primary focus of the thesis is the period of the Popular Front when the Moselle was under French rule, the author deemed it unnecessary to devote time to the Koblenz material. The same applied for the brief section on the Heimatbund. German agents participated in the Autonomist campaign in the Moselle and Alsace and the Koblenz archives hold documents pertaining to these events, but since the author sought only to highlight the significance of Autonomism as a divisive factor of *départemental* politics, the examination of these documents seemed unnecessary.

³⁷ Ingo Kolboom, *La Revanche des Patrons, le patronat français face au Front populaire*, Paris: Flammarion, 1986.

Chapter outline

The thesis is organised chronologically. In order to situate events within a broader context, it offers a comparative study of local and national events. Similarly, in order to situate the events within a longer-term context, the first chapter (1871-1934) gives an overview of Mosellan politics and society when the region was under German domination up until the formation of the Popular Front. Though the thesis' main focus is the period of the Popular Front, it seemed essential to introduce the distinctive characteristics of the region, namely its cultural and linguistic divisions, its particularism and the role played by religion. These four characteristics largely shaped local politics until 1918, and continued to do so after the region returned to French sovereignty. The chapter is divided into three separate sections. The first part focuses on the history of the Moselle as it transferred from French to German and back to French domination including the effect of the change of sovereignty on the local population. The second section considers the linguistic, religious and socio-economic factors which largely contributed to shaping the Moselle's political character between 1918 and 1934. The third and final section examines the activities of the right and the left. By exploring the development of political Catholicism during the period of the *Reichsland* and its intrinsic role in the construction and expression of Mosellan identity in both the pre- and the post-1918 periods, the chapter explains how the Catholic right succeeded in dominating local politics between 1918 and 1934. It also demonstrates how local political parties were largely influenced by their German roots. This was particularly true of the Union Républicaine Lorraine and the regional federation of the PCF.

Chapter Two (February 1934-March 1936) is a detailed analysis of the formation of the Popular Front nationally and locally. By comparing events at the national and local levels, the chapter demonstrates the Moselle's distinctiveness within the national context. It opens with a brief examination of the events of 6 and 12 February 1934. The second part demonstrates that despite obvious limitations, left wingers, including the CGT and the CGTU trade unions, succeeded in uniting their forces in the Popular Front coalition. At the *départemental* level, those

weaknesses included the unabated mistrust between Socialists and Communists, the PCF's leading influence in the coalition despite a series of internal crises that threatened its unity and the left's inability to mobilise workers in left-wing socio-political action. The final section considers how the national and local right reacted to the formation of the Popular Front and the rising popularity of the *ligues*. Additionally, by examining the results of the 1934 cantonal and 1935 municipal elections, the chapter underscores the Union Républicaine Lorraine's clear domination of local politics.

The third chapter (April-October 1936) analyses the 1936 legislative elections, the ensuing strike movement and the PCF's campaign in the Moselle in October 1936. The first part opens with an examination of the actions of the left and the right in preparation for the elections and shows the divided state of the national and local right against a left which largely followed the strategy of the Popular Front. It closes with a detailed analysis of the election results in the Moselle. The second part considers the national strike movement which paralysed France in the summer of 1936 and which was largely followed in the Moselle, despite having been hitherto largely immune to left-wing political militancy. As the research reveals, this was largely due to the emergence of a new political and social consciousness which was reflected in the CGT's rapid and unmanageable rising membership. Eager to capitalise on the rise of an organised labour movement, the PCF mounted a large propaganda campaign in the Moselle and Alsace in October 1936. The Popular Front government's decision to limit the number of meetings to 10, instead of the 127 sought by the PCF, led to friction between the party and the government. Nonetheless, even the constrained Communist campaign contributed importantly to the radicalisation of the local right, which had hitherto remained largely quiescent. The political party that came to embody this radicalisation was the Parti Social Français, the fastest-growing organisation in France and the Moselle.

Chapter Four (October 1936-February 1937) examines the local right's first collective counter-offensive against the Popular Front and the left's increasing difficulties in maintaining the internal unity of the Popular Front. Fuelled by their success in driving the Communists out of Metz on 10 October 1936 (see chapter

Three) – including party leader Maurice Thorez - and united in a local anti-Marxist bloc known as Front Lorrain, the Mosellan right appeared, at least on the surface, to have finally achieved unity. The first part of the chapter demonstrates that despite the Front Lorrain, right wingers remained largely divided because of personal and political rivalry. The second part explores the first overt signs of division within the Popular Front and its constituent parties. The Spanish Civil War, which began six weeks after Léon Blum took office as France's new Premier in June 1936, tested the unity of the national and local Popular Front. While the PCF supported French intervention in aid of the Spanish Republican forces, the Popular Front government opted for non-intervention. At the same time, the PCF sought to capitalise on the rising membership of the CGT by trying to colonise it. Thus, while attempting to organise support for the Spanish Republic and continuing to appear as the guardians of the unity of the Popular Front, the PCF also sought to destabilise it by seeking control of the CGT, one of the coalition's main associates.

The fifth and final chapter (March 1937-November 1938) considers the downfall of the Popular Front and the right's return to power up until the fateful strike of 30 November 1938. The first section examines the right's radicalisation and attempts at uniting its forces in the Front de la Liberté as well as the growing divisions within the Popular Front. It also examines how the government's decree to reform education in the Moselle in 1936-1937 did not lead to the spontaneous mass protests which occurred when the Radical-Socialist government planned to secularise the Moselle and Alsace twelve years earlier. This particular issue revealed the Mosellans' changed attitude towards the central government's plans to extend France's legislation into the *département* and the politicisation of the religious issue by two competing right-wing parties, the Union Républicaine Lorraine and the Parti Social Français. The second section concentrates on the international context and demonstrates how the emergence of the German threat affected national and local right wingers and undermined the Popular Front. Additionally, it explores how the Popular Front, which was born of an antifascist imperative, failed to prevent the resurgence of a xenophobic and antisemitic

current not seen in France since the Dreyfus affair at the turn of the century.³⁸ In the Moselle, which received large waves of German immigrants fleeing the Nazi regime, antisemites and xenophobes attacked Jews on racial and cultural grounds and increasingly for economic reasons. They included right wingers but also supporters of the Popular Front including Communists and Socialists.

³⁸ The Dreyfus affair erupted after Alfred Dreyfus, a captain in the French army's General Staff, was found guilty of communicating military secret documents to Germany. A Jew of Alsatian origin – part of his family had migrated to Paris after opting for French citizenship in 1871 - he was convicted of treason and sentenced to life imprisonment by a military court. The affair became a judicial and political scandal after it emerged that Dreyfus's conviction was based on a fake document. The scandal divided the country between two opposing groups: the largely right-wing and antisemitic *anti-Dreyfusards* and the mostly liberal *Dreyfusards*.

Chapter One - Society and Politics from the German Empire to the Third Republic, 1871-1934

Introduction

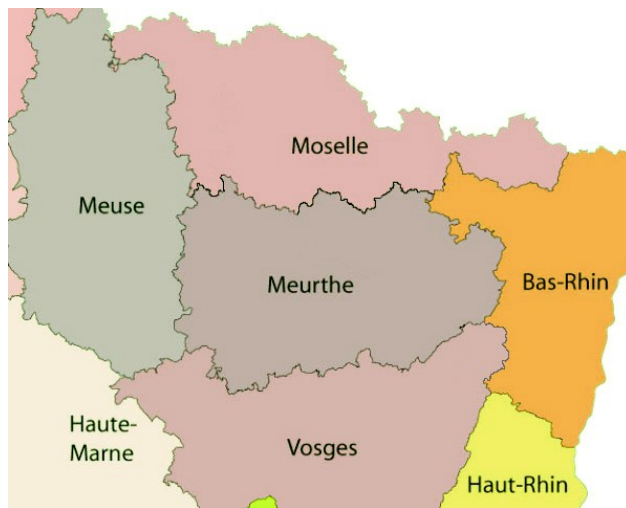
In February 1934 the movement began to unite progressive forces in France into an antifascist Popular Front. On the face of it, the Moselle seemed likely to provide strong support to this movement. Germany had only the previous year turned to fascism, and the Moselle, near the frontier with Germany, one might imagine, would rally to the defence of the Republic, which had liberated the Moselle from forty-seven years of German annexation and continued to protect it. There was also the issue of the separation from the Fatherland which could have meant a strong attachment to France and its republican values. Other factors include the concentration of heavy industry and industrial workers who elsewhere usually supported one or more of the parties of the left. In the Nord, the Paris red belt, for instance, large-scale industry had been a cradle for left-wing trade unions, and in the Moselle workers' solidarity seemed likely to be further encouraged in reaction to the authoritarian management which resisted unionisation and workers' rights. An examination of the Moselle's distinct historical, cultural, social and political aspects indicates, however, that these factors were by no means decisive in shaping the political character of the *département*. As this chapter will demonstrate, factors such as a peculiar linguistic inheritance and regional identity, forged in earlier times, contributed to making the right the dominant force in interwar Mosellan politics.

In order to demonstrate this, the chapter will first offer a brief account of the *département* under the domination of the German Second Empire and its return to French sovereignty. It will then examine how particular linguistic, cultural and social dynamics shaped the Moselle's political character. The third part will explore the formation and development of the political parties that emerged after the Moselle's return to France in the years leading to the formation of the Popular Front.

Part one: From *Reichsland* to *Département*

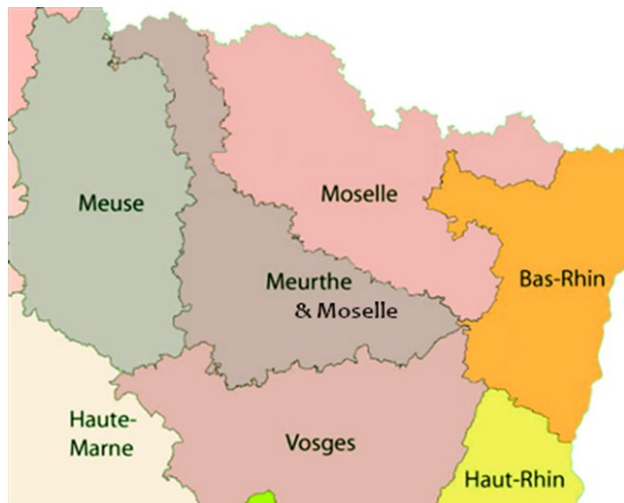
Following the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war and despite the protests of the deputies of Alsace, the Meurthe and the Moselle, the French ceded to a victorious Germany part of its territory on its eastern frontier: the Alsace region and the eastern part of Lorraine which consisted of the southern area of the Meurthe *département* with the cantons of Château-Salins and Sarrebourg, and the whole of the Moselle *département* with the exclusion of the canton of Briey.³⁹ By ratifying the cession of the territories to Germany on 10 May 1871, the Frankfurt Peace Treaty reconfigured the administrative and political geography of Lorraine (Figure 3 and Figure 4).

Figure 3 The Moselle and the Meurthe before 1871



³⁹ On 26 February 1871, the French National Assembly voted 546 to 171 in favour of the ratification of the preliminary Versailles Peace Treaty with Germany. The total surface of the territory conceded to Germany was 1,452,181 hectares. The exact territories were the Bas-Rhin, the Haut-Rhin except Belfort, 3/4 of the Moselle, 1/3 of the Meurthe and two cantons of the Vosges: Saales and Schirmeck. The territory of Belfort, which was in Alsace and which Bismarck wanted, remained French in exchange for cantons located around Sarrebourg and Château-Salins. For further reading on the Franco-Prussian war and the formation of the 1871 boundary, see Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War, the German Invasion of France 1870-1871*, London, New York: Routledge, 2001, Richard Hartshorne, 'The Franco-German Boundary of 1871', *World Politics*, II, January 1950, pp.209-250, Dan P. Silverman, *Reluctant Union, Alsace-Lorraine and Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University, 1972, Roth, *La Lorraine Annexée, Etude sur la Présidence de Lorraine dans l'Empire Allemand (1870-1918)* and by the same author *La Guerre de 70*.

Figure 4 The Moselle and the new Meurthe-et-Moselle after 1871



Henceforth Lothringen was administratively attached to Alsace, despite previously having had no substantial historical, political or cultural relations with it. It became part of the *Reichsland Elsaß-Lothringen* province of the new German Reich, and remained under German rule for the next forty-seven years. As the new rulers began germanising the provinces, they required the local population to choose between French and German citizenship. Those who opted for French citizenship had to leave the territory by 1 October 1872. According to Grohmann and H  l  ne Sicard-Lenattier, only 6 percent of Lorrainers opted for French citizenship.⁴⁰ Metz, which had been Francophone for centuries, lost 20 percent of its population mainly businessmen, civil servants and notables.⁴¹ By and large, those who emigrated settled in neighbouring Meurthe-et-Moselle or went to Algeria.⁴² With the onset of mass industrialisation in the region in the 1890s, large waves of German workers migrated to take up employment in the steelworks situated around Thionville and the coal mines near Forbach. By 1895, 22 percent of the population was of

⁴⁰ Grohmann, 'The Problems of Integrating Annexed Lorraine into France', p.7 and H  l  ne Sicard-Lenattier, *Les Alsaciens-Lorrains    Nancy, 1870-1914*, Harou  : G  rard Louis, 2002, p.56.

⁴¹ Grohmann, 'The Problems of Integrating Annexed Lorraine into France', p.8.

⁴² See Alfred Wahl, *L'Option et l'Emigration des Alsaciens-Lorrains, 1871-1872*, Paris: Editions Ophrys, 1974.

German extraction.⁴³ In Metz, the centre of the new civil and military authorities, the ratio was even higher with 50 percent of the population coming from Germany. This influx of German nationals in Lorraine, which surpassed the 14 percent average in the *Reichsland*, would result in mass departures after 1918.

First governed by local civil servants reporting directly to Germany's emperor Wilhelm I, the *Reichsland* slowly acquired a measure of political and administrative independence.⁴⁴ Germany appointed a local *Statthalter* (governor) in Strasbourg who was assisted by an appointed council (*Landesausschuß*). The decision to transfer some of the powers from Berlin to Strasbourg meant however that Metz came under the authority of Alsace; something the Metz notables were far from satisfied with.⁴⁵ Later, the Constitutional Laws of May 1911 changed the status of the region from *Reichsland* to *Land* with delegates sitting in the *Bundesrat*. The *Landesausschuß* in turn became the *Landtag* with upper and lower houses.⁴⁶ Half the *Landtag's* upper house was selected by the Emperor, with the rest chosen by local assemblies and socioeconomic groups such as farmers and artisans. The lower house comprised sixty representatives elected directly by the people of Alsace-Lorraine and serving for a five-year term. Alsace had forty representatives, Lorraine twenty. Although much of the legislative power remained in the hands of the Emperor, the *Landtag* provided the provinces a certain autonomy that later proved difficult to reconcile with the French conception of centralised powers and administration.

After Marshal Ferdinand Foch's troops entered Metz in November 1918, events moved swiftly for the Moselle. In the French National Assembly, Georges Clémenceau, France's Premier, proudly announced '*l'évacuation immédiate des territoires envahis y compris l'Alsace-Lorraine dans moins de quinze jours*.'⁴⁷ Soon after, the recovered territories of Alsace-Lorraine were put under the

⁴³ Grohmann, 'The Problems of Integrating Annexed Lorraine into France', p.11.

⁴⁴ For a comprehensive description of the *Reichsland's* administrative organisation see Roth, *La Lorraine Annexée, 1870-1918*, pp.48-91.

⁴⁵ The Germans established presidencies (*Bezirkspraesidium*) in Lorraine and Lower and Upper Alsace. They closed them in 1879.

⁴⁶ AN, Millerand papers, 'Notice Spéciale à l'Alsace-Lorraine', 1913, 470AP45.

⁴⁷ JO, Chambre, Débats 11 novembre 1918, 12 novembre 1918, p.8.

administration of the War Ministry headed by Clémenceau (decrees of 15-16 and 26 November 1918). A further decree of 21 March 1919 placed the three provinces in the care of the *haut-commissariat d'Alsace-Lorraine* based in Strasbourg, which reported directly to the office of the *président du Conseil* (Prime Minister) in Paris. Three *départemental* commissions were set up in Metz, Colmar and Strasbourg to assist the *haut commissariat*. It soon became apparent that the French government favoured a progressive rather than an immediate assimilation into the Republic. Regarding the provinces' specific legislation, the decree of 6 December 1918 and the laws of 19 October 1919 and 1 January 1924 stipulated that local law (*droit local*) would continue to apply in the recovered territories until 1934. A subsequent law passed in December 1934 delayed the introduction of French legislation by another eleven years until 1 January 1945.

When Alexandre Millerand took office as *Haut Commissaire* in Strasbourg in March 1919 he knew of the various problems facing the three *départements* and their reintegration within French sovereignty as he wrote, 'It is certain that the transition from one rule to another, and from one code of laws to another will cause many problems. For it must be remembered that half a century means much in the life of a people.'⁴⁸ Because he realised the effect of forty-seven years of different regulations, laws, currency and language on the provinces, he was a keen supporter of a transitory regime that should use persuasion to bring Alsace and the Moselle into the French Republic. He recommended, in his own words, '*de ne pas précipiter les choses*'.⁴⁹ Like General Charles Mangin and Marshall Foch before him, he promised the Mosellans that '*la République respectera vos croyances, vos coutumes et vos traditions*'.⁵⁰

After the signature of the Versailles Treaty in June 1919, the *Reichsland* was officially returned to France in its 1871 boundaries and Lothringen became the Moselle *département*; the two regions of Alsace, known as *Bezirk*

⁴⁸ Alexandre Millerand, 'Alsace-Lorraine, The Touchstone for Victory, Plans for the Future', *The Times*, 6 September 1919, p.40. Millerand resigned as *haut commissaire* in January 1920 when he became *président du Conseil*.

⁴⁹ Millerand, 'L'Alsace-Lorraine', *Le Temps*, 16 avril 1919, p.45.

⁵⁰ AN, Millerand papers, 'Notes de discours', mai 1919, 470AP44.

Oberelsaß and *Bezirk Unterelsaß* under German control, became the Haut-Rhin and Bas-Rhin *départements*. The French, who had kept alive the myth of the amputated Republic and made the return of Alsace-Lorraine to French sovereignty one of their favourite propaganda topics during the Great War, had hoped for a painless return of the provinces. But after the first few weeks of euphoria that followed the liberation, relations between the Moselle and Paris deteriorated and Mosellans grew anxious over the integration of their region into the French central state. The first signs of malaise between the indigenous population and their new rulers emerged when the French began to send German nationals to Germany as part of the region's *francisation*.

In her study of the *francisation* of the Moselle, Carolyn Grohmann reveals that between December 1918 and late 1921 the French organised the removal of approximately 100,000 Germans as well as native Mosellans and Alsatians who had worked as civil servants or held political appointments under German rule – roughly 20 percent of the total population.⁵¹ Indeed, soon after the Armistice the French set up commissions, known as *commissions de triage*, whose role was to identify and expel the unwanted Germans and local collaborators. The French allowed them to take goods or cash to a maximum of 10,000 marks per family while confiscating the rest of their possessions including property and bank accounts. In order to identify the level of 'Frenchness' or 'Germanness' of the population, the French put in place a four-tier system: card A was given to those who had once held French citizenship, card B was granted to those born in Alsace-Lorraine with at least one parent entitled to card A, card C was issued to foreigners from non-enemy states, while card D was distributed to the undesirables, those from enemy states such as Germany or Austria-Hungary. This four-tier system, based on the blood origins of the individuals rather than their place of birth, went against traditional Republican principles of citizenship. According to the Republican credo, as Tim Baycroft writes, 'To belong to the

⁵¹ Carolyn, Grohmann, 'From Lothringen to Lorraine: Expulsion and Voluntary Repatriation', p.583. For further reading on the movements of population after 1918 in the recovered territories, see Laird Boswell, *op.cit.*

French nation, individuals did not need to be born French, but could be assimilated into it through an acceptance of the principles of the Republic encapsulated in the revolutionary slogan “liberty, equality, fraternity”.⁵²

Although the majority of the 100,000 who left the region did it of their own accord, some Mosellans began to feel ill at ease with what they considered an unjust and arbitrary system that had condemned not only Germans but also Mosellans to exile. As Grohman writes, the commissions ‘caused untold damage to the reputation and perceived integrity of the new French regime.’⁵³ Jean Stuhl, the Mosellan senator for Bitche, wrote to Henri Cacaud, the secretary-general of the *commissariat de la République* in Strasbourg, recommending leniency in the treatment of German nationals. He warned that should Germany annex the provinces again it would promptly expel French citizens. In such an event, ‘*c’est l’expulsion sans merci et la confiscation des biens pour tous les Français originaires de ce pays.*’⁵⁴ The euphoria that had welcomed French troops in the streets of Metz in November 1918 was thus replaced by a disaffection that even had its own name: *le malaise mosellan*. Corinne Bonafoux-Verrax writes of this malaise,

*Si les Alsaciens-Lorrains dans leur immense majorité considèrent la France comme leur mère patrie et la retrouvent avec un sentiment ardent de joie et de patriotisme, il n’en demeure pas moins que, durant les mois et les années qui suivent leur réintégration, des froissements d’amour propre, des susceptibilités, de vraies craintes sont à l’origine d’un réel malaise.*⁵⁵

The euphoria of November 1918, intensified by the ending of the harsh martial law imposed by the German army for over four years, thus proved short-lived, and in the ensuing malaise a strong regional identity reappeared in the Moselle, formed of linguistic, social, political and religious elements. Charles Beckenhaupt, a contemporary journalist who studied the Autonomist movement in

⁵² Timothy Baycroft, ‘France’, in Baycroft and Mark Hewitson (eds.), *What is a Nation? Europe 1789-1914*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, p.28.

⁵³ Grohman, ‘From Lothringen to Lorraine: Expulsion and Voluntary Repatriation’, p.580.

⁵⁴ AN, Cacaud papers, Lettre du sénateur Colonel J. Stuhl à Henri Cacaud, 7 août 1922, 485AP5.

⁵⁵ Corinne Benafoux-Verrax, *A la Droite de Dieu: La Fédération Nationale Catholique, 1924-1944*, Paris: Fayard, 2004, p.20.

Alsace in the interwar period, argued that this malaise was a reaction to the German annexation in 1871. As he wrote, '*c'est à 1870 et non à 1918 que remonte l'origine du malaise*'.⁵⁶ This view is shared by François Roth who affirms that Mosellans developed a regional identity after 1871 when their patriotism based on local customs and myths devoid of any Teutonic reference was repressed by their new German rulers. Like Grohmann, he argues that this regional identity resulted from a strong resentment towards Germany and France but also towards Alsace.

After 1871, many Mosellans became resentful of the central powers of Strasbourg and Berlin, but instead of turning to Alsace which shared the experience of annexation, they protested that there was no Alsace-Lorraine and that it was merely Bismarck's artificial creation. Grohmann argues that an Alsace-Lorraine identity never developed after German annexation and that, as she puts it, 'instead of turning to Alsace and drawing upon the shared experience of annexation, Mosellans had grown to resent Alsatian dominance'.⁵⁷ In support of this claim she quotes the local right-wing nationalist newspaper *Le Messin*, which asserted in 1920, 'there is no Alsace-Lorraine; this word only exists in the Treaty of Frankfurt'.⁵⁸ Indeed, many Mosellans felt that after being abandoned by Paris, they were forced by Berlin to submit to Alsatian authority. This resulted in disillusionment and a sense of isolation which, after the liberation, manifested itself in a *particularisme* mosellan.

Part Two: Language, Culture and Religion

During the interwar period, this particularism, which had its roots in the region's distinct linguistic, social and religious context, manifested itself in the Moselle's distinctive politics. To determine the extent of its influence on local politics, it is essential to explore it in more details.

⁵⁶ Charles Beckenhaupt, *Race, Langue ou Patrie?*, Strasbourg: Librairie Istra, 1930, p.10.

⁵⁷ Lawrence, Baycroft and Grohmann, *op.cit.*, p.64.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Unlike Alsace, which presented a rather homogenised linguistic landscape with largely German and dialect speakers, the Moselle was split into two large linguistic zones: German and Platt-speakers on the one side - Platt being the Frankish dialect used in the Moselle - and Francophones on the other. Figure 5 outlines the linguistic geography.

Figure 5 The linguistic geography



Many observers have acknowledged the fundamental importance of this linguistic frontier. For Jean Lanher, the region's linguistic divide represented '*non seulement deux modes d'expression linguistique mais encore ... deux modes de vie ou deux types de pensée.*'⁵⁹ Maurice Toussaint similarly claimed that the linguistic frontier separated the *département* into two distinct linguistic and cultural entities, thus

⁵⁹ Colette Méchin et Sylvie Maurer, *Frontière Linguistique et frontières des usages en Moselle*, Mission du patrimoine ethnologique de France: Strasbourg, 1995, p.10.

resulting in a strong community spirit on both sides of the barrier.⁶⁰ Metz, the capital of the *département* and Francophone for centuries, was in the French zone. Forbach, the Moselle's second largest town, was in the German and Platt-speaking zone. As for Thionville, situated in the north-east of the *département*, it was split: French speakers in the western part of the town and Platt or German speakers in the east. Interestingly, Germany used the presence of German speakers in Lorraine to justify the annexation of the region in 1871, despite the fact that Metz and Chateau-Sâlines had been French for centuries and their population considered German a foreign language. If anything, this demonstrates that the annexation of Lorraine into the German Reich was motivated not by cultural and linguistic affinity, as Bismarck had claimed, but by political, economic and strategic advantage.⁶¹

This linguistic divide was not a consequence of the German annexation in 1871. It had existed for centuries and varied little between the repetitive cycles of French and German conquests that occurred in Lorraine. Roth traces the origins of the frontier to the Middle Ages. As he writes, '*Une ligne presque invariable depuis la fin du Moyen Age, court du Luxembourg au Donon. Elle est ... d'une très grande netteté car on passe directement du village de langue française à celui de langue allemande.*'⁶² As for Dan P. Silverman,

Many nineteenth-century German studies indicated a larger German-speaking area than actually existed, but German exaggeration should not obscure the fact that in nearly two centuries of French rule, the French language had made only minimal gains in ... Lorraine.⁶³

Despite his warnings of 'German exaggeration', Silverman uses German studies to establish the number of people who spoke French, German or both in the late 1870s. And even according to these studies, by 1879, only 50 percent of the

⁶⁰ Maurice Toussaint, *La Frontière Linguistique en Lorraine*, Paris: Picard, 1955.

⁶¹ Michael Howard states that, after much hesitation, Bismarck yielded to the demands of the army and German public opinion to annex parts of Francophone Lorraine and Metz in particular; in Howard, *op.cit.* p.448. For Silverman, military factors prevailed in the Germans' decision to annex Metz; in *Reluctant Union*, p.32.

⁶² Roth, *La Lorraine Annexée*, p.45.

⁶³ Silverman, *Reluctant Union*, p.76.

Moselle spoke German compared to the average 80 percent for the whole of the *Reichsland*.⁶⁴ Approximately 30 percent spoke French in the Moselle and 12 percent in the whole of the *Reichsland*. The Moselle's remaining 17 percent could communicate in both French and German. These figures clearly indicate that the Moselle comprised more French speakers than the rest of the *Reichsland* and that despite the Germanisation of the Moselle in the wake of the German annexation, a large proportion of the population still used French. Not surprisingly, following the departure of around 100,000 individuals between 1918 and 1921, the first French population census conducted in the Moselle reveals that the number of French speakers had substantially increased: by the mid-1920s 45 percent of Mosellans spoke French and 34 percent spoke only French.⁶⁵ The rest of the population, 33 percent, spoke German or Platt.

The linguistic divide caused many difficulties for the new French civil servants who came to the Moselle after 1918. Unable to communicate with a large section of the indigenous population, whom they wrongly considered Germanophile, the linguistic obstacle deepened the malaise between the new rulers and the local population. On the one side, the French, who had expected to find Mosellans staunch patriots eager to re-join the Republic, anticipated that the assimilation of the Moselle would be a seamless process and did not anticipate such a wide linguistic gulf. On the other, the local population had been led to believe that the French would respect their traditions and customs and resented the French lack of understanding and consideration for their linguistic practices. After all, as indicated earlier in this chapter, Millerand, Mangin and Foch, representing the French state, had proclaimed that the Republic would respect local beliefs and customs. Faced with zealous civil servants keen to quickly remove any trace of German control, Mosellans began to feel anxious at the

⁶⁴ The rate was highest in Lower Alsace where over 95 percent of the population spoke German and only 4 percent spoke French. In Upper Alsace, German speakers represented roughly 80 percent of the population and French speakers, fewer than 4 percent; in Silverman, *Reluctant Union*, p.75. Silverman bases most of his figures on the work of Maximilian du Prel, *Die deutsche Verwaltung in Elsass-Lothringen, 1870-1879*, Strasbourg: K.J. Trübner, 1879.

⁶⁵ Office régional de statistique d'Alsace et de Lorraine, *Annuaire Statistique (Bas-Rhin, Haut-Rhin, Moselle), 1919-1931, Premier Volume*, Strasbourg: Imprimerie Alsacienne, 1932, p.15.

central state's assimilation process. A sense of disillusionment and deception thus emerged on both sides. As Grohmann writes,

A sense of deception on both sides undoubtedly lay at the heart of the matter. Wartime propaganda had led the French to expect a region full of staunch patriots who had heroically resisted Germanisation. Equally, they were not prepared for the linguistic gulf which lay between them and the majority of the native population.... The indigènes, on the other hand, had been led to believe that a return to French sovereignty would be accompanied by respect for [their] special religious practices, local dialects and laws...⁶⁶

On the Mosellans' side, this sense of deception remained largely quiescent in the immediate post-war period but entered the public and political domains when France sought to impose the Republic's secular laws in the *département* in 1924. As *Haut-Commissaire*, Millerand blamed the pre-1870 French authorities for not broadening enough the use of French in the region. As he wrote in *The Times*, 'France did not even think before 1870 to teach French in every school.... It now finds this linguistic difference an obstacle to a rapid assimilation.'⁶⁷ Henri Cacaud commented on the linguistic issue: '*Il n'en est [de question] qui ait fait l'objet d'études plus attentives, qui ait soulevé plus de polémiques.*'⁶⁸ He recommended the French be patient: '*Peu à peu, à mesure que la fusion des trois départements avec les autres se fera plus intime, à mesure que les jeunes générations feront nombre, le français se généralisera.*'⁶⁹ Cacaud was proven right when the population census of 1936 indicated that 70 percent of the population spoke French.⁷⁰

Interestingly, the two linguistic zones also followed a socio-economic divide that split the *département* in two distinct zones. By and large, those who spoke French only were the urban, rural and industrial white-collar elites in the west of the *département*. They included the Francophone notables of Metz who after being freed from Alsatian influence created the conservative and Catholic Union

⁶⁶ Lawrence, Baycroft and Grohmann, *op.cit.*, p.68.

⁶⁷ Millerand, 'Alsace-Lorraine, The Touchstone for Victory, Plans for the Future', p.40.

⁶⁸ AN, Cacaud papers, 'La Question de la Langue', nd, 485AP5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Office régional de statistique d'Alsace et de Lorraine, *op.cit.*, p15

Républicaine Lorraine, the Moselle's most influential party in the interwar period which shall be discussed later in this chapter. Those who communicated mainly in German or Platt were found among the industrial and rural working masses or small landowners in the eastern and southern cantons. They formed the backbone of the Germanophile, clerical and autonomist movement, which shall also be discussed later in this chapter. To be sure, there were exceptions as many could converse in both languages, but they were mainly found among the affluent and educated strata of Francophone society. This economic and linguistic divide existed prior to the German annexation. As Pierre Brasme demonstrates in his study of nineteenth-century Mosellan demographics, the German and Platt speaking parts of the region lagged behind the Francophone zone both economically and socially. He quotes the words of a *sous-préfet* who wrote in 1853: '*Tandis que la partie française ... voit fleurir dans ses villages le travail et l'aisance, la partie allemande n'est que trop souvent le théâtre d'une misère honteuse.*'⁷¹

Another distinct characteristic of the Moselle was the presence of a large number of foreign immigrants, which deepened the cultural and linguistic rift. Despite the departure of around 100,000 individuals after 1918, the Moselle experienced a steady rise in population in the post-war period. In 1919 the population stood at roughly 550,000. It reached 630,000 by 1926 and 695,000 by 1931.⁷² The rise was due in part to the arrival of French people from the neighbouring Meurthe-et-Moselle and beyond, known as *Français de l'Intérieur* - mostly civil servants called in to process the assimilation of the *département* into the Republic - new notables such as doctors and lawyers, but more importantly to the arrival of foreign immigrants. These new comers had left their countries for economic reasons and were attracted to the Moselle on account of its strong economy based largely on steel-making around Thionville and Metz and

⁷¹ Pierre Brasme, *La Population de la Moselle au XIXe siècle*, Metz: Editions Serpenoises, 2000, p.42.

⁷² Statistique générale de la France, *Résultats Statistiques du Recensement Général de la Population effectué le 8 mars 1931*, Tome I, Troisième partie, p.133.

coalmining in the French Saarland. A first wave of foreign immigrants, mainly Italians, arrived in the German *Lothringen* at the turn of the century, which coincided with the boom years of the region's industrial revolution and the development of large-scale industries.

According to Brasme, there were roughly 50,000 foreigners in Lothringen in 1905, over half of whom were Italians.⁷³ The second wave arrived after the restoration of French sovereignty in 1918. Their numbers grew from 85,500 in 1921 to 111,000 in 1926⁷⁴ and to 131,000 in 1931.⁷⁵ With the Depression and the slump in commercial exchange with Germany and the Saarland in particular, Mosellan workers faced large-scale unemployment. Foreigners, the first to lose their jobs, decreased to 91,700 in 1936, almost a third in five years.⁷⁶ Of a total foreign population of 130,000 in 1928, 16 percent were Germans (mainly Saarlanders), 24 percent Poles and 25 percent Italians.⁷⁷ In the early 1930s, the Moselle counted twenty-two foreign nationalities who made up 20 percent of its total population.⁷⁸ Within the total workforce the ratio of foreign to native worker was one in five but it was in large-scale industries, where left-wing political activism was most likely to develop, that the ratio reached its highest at one in three.

The main consequence of this cultural and linguistic heterogeneity was the division of the industrial workforce along linguistic and socio-cultural lines which, as shall be examined later in this chapter, hindered the development of the socialist doctrine of class homogeneity and identity. Indeed, workers in the Moselle rarely identified themselves according to political class but rather according to their linguistic and cultural background. Police sources reveal that foreign workers generally preferred to join associations that focused on the protection of their own

⁷³ Brasme, *La Population de la Moselle au XIXe siècle*, p.145.

⁷⁴ Statistique Générale de la France, *Résultats Statistiques du Recensement Général de la Population effectué le 7 mars 1926*, Tome II, 1929, p.41.

⁷⁵ Statistique Générale de la France, *Résultats Statistiques du Recensement Général de la Population effectué le 8 mars 1936*, Tome II, Paris 1941, p.57.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Office régional de statistique d'Alsace et de Lorraine, p.38.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

national interests. For instance, Polish associations in the mining districts around Metz and near the Saarland, where Poles outnumbered other immigrants, organised regular social events that centred on national activities such as Polish dance and music. Few Polish workers associated with their fellow workers in trade unions or political organisations. What is more, even if they wished to join political organisations, few foreigners, with the exception of the predominantly German element in the railway sector, were prepared to do so from fear of being deported for political reasons.

The third and perhaps the most important factor in the construction of the *particularisme mosellan* was the presence of a well-organised and highly politicised Catholic clergy. In the first years of German domination, the bishop of Metz, Paul Dupont des Loges, advised the clergy to remain apolitical and concentrate on their ecclesiastical duties. But as the Germans launched the *Kulturkampf*, a series of policies aimed at uniting Germany and counteracting the influence of the Catholic Church in the new empire including the *Reichsland*, the Mosellan clergy became more and more involved in political action.⁷⁹ By the 1890s, the local Catholic clergy became, as Silverman puts it, 'one of the strongest political forces operating in ... the *Reichsland*.'⁸⁰ While the *Kulturkampf* contributed to the radicalisation and politicisation of the clergy, it can be said that after the French political elites, especially the Republican ones, fled the region in 1871, they left a vacuum behind them which the clergy filled. As Brigitte Favrot writes,

L'une des conséquences directes des événements de 1870 a été l'émigration massive des classes dirigeantes lorraines qui ont fui la tutelle allemande.... Ce fut donc au clergé, dès lors seul Pouvoir influent demeuré en place, qu'incomba un rôle particulier dans la

⁷⁹ The *Kulturkampf* was a campaign organised by the German government against the Catholic Church in the 1870s. In the *Reichsland*, the *Kulturkampf* led to restrictions on Catholic education, press as well as the expulsion of some religious orders. For further reading on the *Kulturkampf*, see Helmut Walter Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: culture, ideology, politics, 1870-1914*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994 and Ronald J. Ross, 'Enforcing the *Kulturkampf* in the Bismarckian State and the Limits of Coercion in Imperial Germany', *The Journal of Modern History*, 56, 3, September 1984, pp.456-482. For the effect of the *Kulturkampf* in the *Reichsland*, see Christian Baechler, *Le Parti Catholique Alsacien, 1890-1939: du Reichsland à la République jacobine*, Paris: Editions Ophrys, 1982, pp.19-21.

⁸⁰ Silverman, 'Political Catholicism and Social Democracy in Alsace-Lorraine, 1871-1914', *Catholic Historical Review*, 52, 1, April 1966, p.39.

*société: à ses fonctions morales traditionnelles se sont ajoutés un devoir et une mission politiques.... [L]e clergé est ainsi devenu le principal représentant et défenseur des intérêts lorrains.*⁸¹

This was a view shared by François de Wendel, the French industrialist and right-wing politician whose family lost mines and factories to Germans after the annexation. As he declared at the National Assembly, ‘après 1871, à cause de l’émigration d’une large partie des élites dans les territoires annexés, le clergé seul était resté pour défendre et représenter les intérêts moraux et politiques de la France.’⁸² For Silverman, on the other hand, the most decisive factor in the politicisation of the *Reichsland*’s clergy was the rise of social democracy. As he states,

it was only when the threat from the rising tide of social democracy became acute in the *Reichsland* during the 1890s, that the Catholics were challenged sufficiently to form a regular political organization which might compete with the Socialist political machine.⁸³

Though both Favrot and Silverman’s interpretations are valid, it should be noted that the rise of political Catholicism in the *Reichsland* coincided with a major event that would have repercussions throughout the Catholic world: the publication of Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical letter *Rerum novarum* in 1891. In keeping with Leo XIII’s writings, the Church condemned socialism as ungodly, promoted social solidarity over the accumulation of private and personal wealth, and organised politically in order to insulate the working masses from the spread of socialism. The fact that the large majority of the population in the provinces was Catholic made the task easier for the local clergy. Indeed, quoting an article published in the newspaper *Augsburg Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1872, Silverman suggests that political Catholicism drew its support from ‘the three quarters of the population of the *Reichsland* [that] are devoted sons of the Church’.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Brigitte Favrot, *Le Gouvernement Allemand et le Clergé Catholique Lorrain de 1890 à 1914*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1981, p.7.

⁸² JO, Chambre, Débats 7 février 1929, 8 février 1929, p.421.

⁸³ Silverman, ‘Political Catholicism and Social Democracy in Alsace-Lorraine’, p.39.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.41.

Interestingly enough, two clergymen from the Moselle paved the way for the creation of social Catholicism in nineteenth-century France. Following the rural exodus that drained the Mosellan countryside of its population in the first half of the nineteenth century, Jean Loevenbruck, a *révérénd Père* from a small village located east of Thionville, founded in 1822 *L'Œuvre de Saint-Joseph*, France's first association designed to help blue-collar workers freshly arrived in the French capital.⁸⁵ The aim of the association was to provide workers with what Loevenbruck called '*une tendre sollicitude et les secours d'une charité toute chrétienne*.'⁸⁶ This Christian charity included the provision of housing and health care as well as leisure activities on Sundays so that, as Loevenbruck stated, '*les ouvriers ... sans expérience ... trouveront divers moyens de passer ces jours saints sans qu'il en coûte ni à leur santé ni à leur bourse*.'⁸⁷ The second pioneering clergyman was Louis Bervanger, an *abbé* from the French Saarland. He took over from Loevenbruck when the latter became ill and founded *L'Œuvre des Apprentis de Saint-Nicolas* in 1827. His association aimed at educating poor children and placing them in the care of Catholic bosses. The Moselle's devotion to the Church was not only present among its clergymen. Figures from the population census of 1866 – the last survey by the French state before the cession of the provinces to Germany – indicate that in the Moselle the proportion of Catholics was 97 percent of the total population: the highest percentage in the whole of France.⁸⁸

Determined not to let the German Catholic Zentrum interfere in local affairs, Catholics in the *Reichsland* created the *Elsass-Lothringisches Zentrum* in 1906. Despite a doctrine close to that of the national Zentrum, the *Elsass-Lothringisches Zentrum* refused to associate formally with the German party precisely because it

⁸⁵ Henri Hiegel, 'Le Catholicisme Social en Moselle de 1823 à 1848', *Information Historique*, 17, 4, 1955, p.141.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.141-142.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.142.

⁸⁸ The Moselle and the Meurthe *départements*, parts of which later formed German Lothringen, both topped the survey with 97 percent. In comparison, the Bas-Rhin counted 65 percent and the Haut-Rhin 87 percent. *Statistique de la France, Résultats Généraux du Dénombrement de 1866*, Première partie, Strasbourg: Berger-Levrault, 1869, p.xxvij.

was German.⁸⁹ While most German-speaking Catholics in German Lorraine joined the Elsass-Lothringisches Zentrum, Francophone Catholics in 1902 formed the Bloc Lorrain in Metz. Francophone Catholics in Lorraine rejected the Elsass-Lothringisches Zentrum on the basis that it was dominated by German-speaking Alsatians who cared little for Lorraine. The Bloc Lorrain, less clerical and more liberal, was led by an influential clergyman from Metz, Canon Henri Dominique Collin, a well-known Francophile who acted as the director of the Metz-based Catholic newspaper *Le Lorrain*.⁹⁰ Using Catholicism as a pillar of Lorrainer identity against Germany and to some extent Alsace, the Bloc Lorrain posed as the defenders of local identity and conditioned the region's political character for decades to come. In the interwar period, its political heir, the Union Républicaine Lorraine, acted in a similar manner and epitomised Mosellan particularism and identity. Until the onset of the Great War, the Catholic parties, whether Francophone or German-speaking, dominated the political scene and won the majority of seats, both locally and nationally.

Indeed, results from the 1911 *Landtag* elections indicate that the two Catholic parties, the Elsass-Lothringisches Zentrum and the Bloc Lorrain, won 60 percent of the seats.⁹¹ The rest of the seats were taken by Liberals (16 percent), Socialists (18 percent) and Independents (5 percent). At the *Reichstag* elections in 1912, they won all the seats but one, which was taken by Socialist Georges Weill in Metz. Thus, the Mosellan political scene was dominated by two parties which shared common principles but a different approach to clericalism in politics as well as a different language. During the Great War the Germans banned all political activity, but Francophone Catholics based in France, such as Collin, remained active. After the departure of the German civil and military authorities in late 1918,

⁸⁹ For an examination of the relations between the national and regional Zentrum, see Christian Baechler, *op.cit.*, pp.95-106.

⁹⁰ Collin was one the first Francophile notables the German sought to intern in August 1914. He managed to flee the region and settled in Paris until the end of the war. Others were not as fortunate and were interned at the Ehrenbreitstein Fortress near Koblenz in Germany until 1918. See Pierre Brasme, *Moselle 1918 – Le Retour à la France*, Paris, Sarreguemines: Pierron, 2008, pp.15-23.

⁹¹ Robert Baldy, *Alsace-Lorraine et l'Empire Allemand*, Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1912, pp.221-222.

the Catholic clergy emerged once more as the sole remaining elite. By then, Catholicism and the political clergy had become intrinsically bound up with regional identity and the *particularisme mosellan*. As it had done during the German annexation, so in the 1920s and 1930s the local clergy acted as defenders of Mosellan identity against the French policies of assimilation.

Part Three: Politics in Interwar Moselle

Before examining the role of Catholics towards the new French rulers, it is necessary to examine the creation of political parties in the wake of the Great War and their development in the years leading up to the creation of the Popular Front. As will be seen, most of them, whether left-wing or right-wing, owed much of their traditions to their German predecessors, which created difficulties for their integration into French political culture. This third part will offer an account of the creation and development of the parties of the right and then the left between 1918 and 1934.

The Right

By far the dominant political party in interwar Moselle, the conservative Catholic Union Républicaine Lorraine was the result of the fusion of the Elsass-Lothringisches Zentrum and the Bloc Lorrain in March 1919. Vetted by the diocese and Monseigneur Jean-Baptiste Pelt, the new Bishop of Metz, and headed by Collin, the Union Républicaine Lorraine was resolutely Catholic and particularist. Upon the creation of the party, Charles Ritz, the Metz-based *abbé* who later became the region's most influential political journalist, wrote in *Le Lorrain*, '*La Lorraine ne veu[t] pas et n'accepte[a] jamais le bénéfice des lois laïques, qu'il s'agisse de la séparation des Eglises et de l'état ou de l'école sans Dieu.*' As well as *Le Lorrain*, which disseminated the party's message to the Francophone Catholic masses, the German newspaper, *Die Lothringer Volkszeitung*, focused on the German-speaking Catholics found mainly in the southern and south-eastern cantons of the *département*. The two newspapers reflected the origins of the two organisations that founded the Union Républicaine Lorraine: the Elsass-

Lothringisches Zentrum and the Bloc Lorrain. Described by Roth as less an organised political party than a loose association of like-minded notables, the Union Républicaine Lorraine, *'s'appuyait sur les notables, les quotidiens messins, Le Lorrain et Le Messin, une fraction du clergé, le patronat local et en particulier la famille de Wendel.'*⁹²

At the French legislative elections in November 1919, the Union Républicaine Lorraine list won 65 percent of the vote and all eight deputy seats allocated to the Moselle.⁹³ It also won all five seats at the 1920 senate elections. In the subsequent legislative elections, the party maintained its strong position as it won all the seats at the Senate and the majority of deputy seats in 1924, 1928 and 1932. The remainder of the seats were won by the French Communist party (PCF), which shall be studied later in this chapter. With an average turnout of 80 percent at each election, Mosellan voters demonstrated not only their understanding and respect of French democracy, but also their attachment to the Catholic faith and those who advocated the protection of Mosellan traditions and identity. Although it has not been possible to determine the party's membership, it is clear that its close relation with the clergy and the *département's* Catholic association, the Action Catholique Lorraine, was a key factor in its success throughout the interwar period.

In a speech made during a meeting of the Action Catholique Lorraine in May 1927, Robert Schuman, a leader of the Union Républicaine Lorraine, affirmed the intimate relationship between his party and the Catholic association. He declared, as a police informer put it: *'L'Union [Républicaine Lorraine] ... sera toujours la force de l'Action Catholique Lorraine.'*⁹⁴ For Schuman, whose political career began in the Elsass-Lothringisches Zentrum, the Union Républicaine Lorraine was a political window through which to express the Action Catholique Lorraine's views. And despite its claims to be apolitical, the Action Catholique

⁹² Roth, *Histoire de la Lorraine: L'Epoque Contemporaine, Tome 2: le Vingtième Siècle, 1914-1994*, Metz: Editions Serpenoises, Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1994, p.90.

⁹³ Georges Lachapelle, *Elections Législatives du 16 Novembre 1919*, Paris: Georges Roustan, 1920, pp.233-235.

⁹⁴ AN, Rapport de l'inspecteur spécial Mathis, Thionville, 9 mai 1927, F7/13223.

Lorraine was largely involved in politics. So close was the relationship between the Action Catholique Lorraine and L'Union Républicaine Lorraine that the Thionville sections of the two organisations agreed to deposit their money at the same bank. As an *inspecteur spécial* reported from an Action Catholique Lorraine meeting in Thionville, '*Une discussion s'engage au sujet des fonds de l'Action [Catholique Lorraine] et de l'Union Républicaine Lorraine et l'accord se fait pour la désignation de la Banque populaire.*'⁹⁵ Though this is no evidence that the other sections of the Action Catholique Lorraine and the Union Républicaine Lorraine operated in a similar fashion, the close relationship between them was clear. Similarly, even though it has not been possible to learn about the financial backing of the Union Républicaine Lorraine, there is every reason to think that the Action Catholique Lorraine, the newspaper *Le Lorrain* and the *patronat* who supported it largely contributed to its financing.

With regards to the political links between the two groups, a police report stated that during the 1928 general assembly of the Action Catholique Lorraine in Metz, Monseigneur Pelt congratulated the Union Républicaine Lorraine deputies for their work in defending Mosellan traditions and urged the 900-strong audience to vote for them at the forthcoming legislative elections. As the report stated,

*Monseigneur Pelt a pris la parole pour remercier les ... députés de la Moselle pour leur dévouement et leur activité, et a recommandé à l'assistance de leur accorder à nouveau confiance à l'occasion des prochaines consultations électorales législatives.*⁹⁶

As a clergyman, Collin attended many of the Action Catholique Lorraine's meetings. Alongside Schuman, the young Union Républicaine Lorraine deputy for East Thionville, he and the Action Catholique Lorraine participated actively in the organisation of the 1919 Semaines Sociales de France in Metz.⁹⁷ Another police report stated that during the same assembly, Robert Sérot, the Union Républicaine Lorraine deputy for the constituency of Metz Campagne, declared

⁹⁵ AN, Rapport de l'inspecteur spécial Mathis, Thionville, 2 février 1927, F7/13223.

⁹⁶ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz au directeur de la sûreté générale, 23 janvier 1928, F7/13225.

⁹⁷ The Semaines Sociales gathered people who aimed at spreading the Catholic Church's social doctrine as enacted in Pope Leo XIII's writings.

that his party was in complete agreement with the Action Catholique Lorraine's position on the issue of the Concordat and school education in the Moselle.⁹⁸

Because these two issues resurfaced regularly in interwar Mosellan politics and contributed to the re-introduction of the religious question in the French political debate in 1924, a few words about them seems essential. Since 1905 the process of separating church and state was largely complete in France, yet after its return to France in 1918 the Moselle continued to live under the Concordat Laws set up by Napoleon in 1802. This meant that whereas in France religious orders were prohibited from participating in state affairs, the Mosellan clergy still played a public role. Here the clergy worked for the French state and the French government selected the head of the diocese, the Bishop of Metz. Additionally, clergymen and women were allowed to provide Mosellan children with religious education as permitted by the 1850 Loi Falloux, which the Germans maintained during the period of the *Reichsland*.

For many Mosellans, the issues of the Concordat and religious education were intrinsically linked. The fact that 90 percent of the population were Catholic and considered the Concordat and the presence of the clergy in the public sphere constituents of their identity made the laicising of the region a daunting challenge for any French government. All too aware that religion was a sensitive issue in the recovered provinces, successive French governments maintained the Concordat and religious education. But when the Radical-Socialist Edouard Herriot took office in June 1924 and announced his intention to introduce the laws of the Republic in the provinces, he provoked the fury of Catholics and right wingers against non-Catholics and the left in general. The antagonism between the proponents of secularism and their opponents, mainly right-wing Catholics, which had lain dormant for almost twenty years, thus resurfaced once more in French politics.

The clash began after Herriot declared at the National Assembly on 17 June,

Le gouvernement est persuadé qu'il interprètera fidèlement le vœu des chères provinces enfin rendues à la France en hâtant la venue

⁹⁸ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz, 23 janvier 1928, F7/13225.

*du jour où seront effacées les dernières différences de législation entre les départements recouverts et l'ensemble du territoire de la République. Dans cette vue, il ... préparera les mesures qui permettront ... d'introduire en Alsace et en Lorraine l'ensemble de la législation républicaine.*⁹⁹

Shortly afterwards, thousands of protesters gathered and demonstrated spontaneously in Metz, Thionville and Forbach calling for Herriot's dismissal. The Action Catholique Lorraine, the right-wing press, mayors, local councillors as well as the Union Républicaine Lorraine deputies and senators formed committees (*comités d'action*) in order to organise the protest. According to a *commissaire spécial*, the mayor of Bitche, fully supported by General Jean Stuhl, a Union Républicaine Lorraine senator and *départemental* councillor, urged all the mayors in his canton to protest against the government's plans to secularise the Moselle.¹⁰⁰ In a resolution written in German and translated by the *commissaire spécial*, a mayor from Stuhl's canton stated,

*Les Maires du pays de Bitche ... [croient] devoir remplir un devoir patriotique, en attirant l'attention de Monsieur ... [Herriot] sur le danger créé dans la région frontalière, par le projet relatif à l'introduction des lois laïques. La majorité de la population de la Lorraine répugne complètement la laïcité.*¹⁰¹

In his column in *Le Lorrain*, Ritz, who by then occupied the function of *départemental* councillor for the Union Républicaine Lorraine as well as his clerical and journalistic roles, warned the government of the Catholics' determination. As he wrote, '*que M. Herriot le sache: ceux qui n'ont pas craint de résister aux boches, même au prix de leur liberté, ne céderont pas devant le bloc des gauches.*'¹⁰² Ritz's '*même au prix de leur liberté*' referred to his experience as a political prisoner at the Ehrenbreitstein Fortress in Germany where a number of Francophile Mosellans and Alsations were interned between 1914 and 1918. In Metz, a large meeting organised by Emile Boiteux, the president of the Action

⁹⁹ JO, Chambre, Débats 17 juin 1924, 18 juin 1924, p.2306.

¹⁰⁰ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au directeur des services généraux de police d'Alsace-Lorraine, 12 juillet 1924, 98AL661.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² AN, extrait du journal *Le Lorrain*, 20 juin 1924, p.1, 30AJ227.

Catholique Lorraine who also happened to be the vice-president of the *départemental* Chamber of Commerce, gathered the local Catholic elite: deputies Schuman and Guy de Wendel, Louis Marin, deputy from Nancy and president of the conservative Fédération Républicaine de France, Paul Vautrin, the conservative mayor of Metz, the bishop of Metz as well as senators and numerous local councillors.¹⁰³ Before a 3,000-strong audience, Schuman warned of some of the consequences of secularism such as the suppression of the bishopric and the end of religious education in schools. Alongside Marin, he promised to fight the introduction of the secular laws at the National Assembly. Despite the undiminishing number of demonstrations on the streets and at the National Assembly, Herriot initially refused to back down and repeated declarations such as this one made in Strasbourg: *'lorsque j'élève mon verre en l'honneur ... de l'Alsace, j'honore la république entière, qui, aujourd'hui, comme au temps de Kléber, demeure la République une et indivisible'*.¹⁰⁴

But after the right-wing deputies from Alsace and the Moselle left the parliamentary debates in protest on 13 November 1924 and pressure from Catholics continued, Herriot on January 1925 announced that the Concordat would be maintained in the Moselle and Alsace. Likewise, his plans to close the French Embassy to the Vatican, which met with the French Catholic clergy's strong opposition, were rejected by the Senate in March. By then, Catholics had had the opportunity to organise effectively. In the Moselle, the Action Catholique Lorraine collected 80,000 signatures in a letter of protest in 1924.¹⁰⁵ By 1927, its membership rose to 30,000 members.¹⁰⁶ German and Platt-speaking Catholics located in the eastern cantons of the Moselle, founded the Volksbund, an association which, like the Action Catholique Lorraine, claimed to defend the interests of Mosellan Catholics in an apolitical manner. Known in French as Action

¹⁰³ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire spécial Wagner, Metz, 14 juillet 1924, 98AL661.

¹⁰⁴ AN, Rapport du préfet du Bas-Rhin au vice-président du Conseil, Strasbourg, 24 juillet 1924, 30AJ207. Jean-Baptiste Kléber, a French general from Strasbourg who fought the enemies of the French Republic both at home and abroad in the 1790s, symbolises Alsace's attachment to the Republic.

¹⁰⁵ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Forbach, 10 janvier 1927, F7/13223.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Populaire Lorraine, the association was conservative, clerical and autonomous. Although little is known of the true reasons for the formation of the Volksbund, it is highly probable that it was created in order to capitalise on the population's dissatisfaction with the French central government and support the new Autonomist party that favoured the creation of an autonomous region of Alsace-Lorraine.

Herriot's plans also led to protests in the rest of the country, even though, as Bonafoux-Verrax writes, '*c'est en Alsace-Lorraine que le vent de la révolte se leva d'abord et souffla le plus fortement.*'¹⁰⁷ Indeed, French Catholics organised under the sponsorship of the Fédération Nationale Catholique which General de Castelnau created in November 1924. De Castelnau, known for his fervent Catholicism and mistrust of the Republican regime, once declared, '*on ne peut être républicain et Catholique à la fois.*'¹⁰⁸ Even though Boiteux regularly attended the Fédération Nationale Catholique's annual general assemblies and the Action Catholique Lorraine joined, albeit informally, the Fédération Nationale Catholique, the Mosellan association remained largely independent.

It is clear that this episode allowed the debate over secularism and the place of the Catholic Church in society to take centre stage. Additionally, it provided the Union Républicaine Lorraine and the Action Catholique Lorraine with the opportunity to appear as the chief guardians of the region's identity and special legislation. Above all, it re-ignited the quiescent religious argument that had contributed importantly to the left-right and right-wing divide in the first decades of the French Republic. Consequently, one of the groups most eager to capitalise on the new religious conflict and the thousands of discontented Catholics in the Moselle, were the anti-Republican right-wing *ligues*.

Pierre Taittinger, whose family had left the Moselle when it was annexed by Germany in 1871, founded the Jeunesses Patriotes in December 1924. Created as an offshoot of the Ligue des Patriotes, which had once been led by Maurice

¹⁰⁷ Bonafoux-Verrax, *op.cit.*, p.22.

¹⁰⁸ De Castelnau, 'Point de Direction...', *Le Point de Direction*, Extrait du Bulletin Officiel de la Fédération nationale catholique, mai 1925, No1; in AN, F7/13219. According to Bonafoux-Verrax, the Fédération Nationale Catholique counted between 1.5 and 2 million members in 1925.

Barrès, the nationalistic author from Lorraine who campaigned for the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France before 1918, the *ligue* counted roughly 3,000 members nationally in 1925; ten years later, its membership shot up to 100,000.¹⁰⁹ Patriotic and nationalistic, the *ligue* was also fiercely anti-Communist. Its followers included people from various socio-economic classes. But as Robert Soucy points out, 'If the leadership of the [Jeunesses Patriotes] clearly came from upper-middle-class and aristocratic backgrounds, the rank-and-file of the movement was lower middle class.'¹¹⁰ In the Moselle, the Jeunesses Patriotes was not particularly successful at attracting members. Though the *département's* exact membership remains unknown, the leader of the Metz section complained of the poor membership and a chronic lack of interest among the region's youth. At the *ligue's* general assembly in Metz in November 1926, the police reported twenty attendants. And Testulat, the leader of the Metz section, was reported to have stated that '*étant en si petit nombre, nous ne pourrions jamais nous considérer comme étant l'Etat-major des [jeunesses] de la Moselle.*'¹¹¹

Despite its low membership, the *ligue* could nonetheless rely on the support of influential right-wing politicians such as Ritz, Guy de Wendel and the new head of the Union Républicaine Lorraine, the senator General Edouard Hirschauer. All three attended private meetings of the Jeunesses Patriotes and the Ligue des Patriotes. Hirschauer became president of the Ligue des Patriotes in July 1925, which shows that some politicians were able to lead a mainstream political party as well as an anti-Republican organisation; just as it was entirely possible to be Catholic, particularist and Republican. Ritz was also a fervent supporter of the two organisations. Largely influenced by the writings of Maurice Barrès, he advocated the *ligue's* values of the celebration of family, the preservation of one's roots and the cult of the dead. During a private meeting of the Jeunesses Patriotes, he quoted the words of Frédéric Mistral, the famous regionalist poet from Provence,

¹⁰⁹ Philippe Guimberteau et Cyril Le Tallec, *La France Politique 1900-1940*, Paris: Godefroy de Bouillon, 2002, p.22.

¹¹⁰ Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The First Wave, 1924-1933*, New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1986, p.49.

¹¹¹ AN, Rapport du commissaire de police de Metz centrale, 5 novembre 1926, F7/13233.

*'J'aime mon village plus que ton village, j'aime ma province plus que ta province mais j'aime ma patrie au dessus de tout.'*¹¹²

The other *ligue* that sought to develop in the Moselle was the Action Française. Founded in 1898, the organisation was overtly anti-Republican, antisemitic and nationalistic. It later became monarchist under the influence of the author and political essayist Charles Maurras. Posing as the defender of the Catholic Church in France and the Communists' arch-adversary, the Action Française counted 30,000 fee-paying members nationally in 1924.¹¹³ The *ligue* did not wait for the wave of Catholic protest in 1924 to establish itself in the Moselle. Imported into the *département* by M. de Marmier, an aristocratic landowner who moved to the Moselle after 1918, the organisation was particularly active during the 1924 election campaign. But due to a lack of candidates and followers, it quickly abandoned its political agenda. Initially attached to the Alsace-Lorraine regional section of the Action Française, an independent Mosellan section was created in 1930. The leader of the Metz section's sole public explanation for the separation from Alsace was, as a *commissaire* noted in a report, '*pour des raisons internes*'.¹¹⁴

Following Herriot's declaration on 17 June 1924, it developed an active propaganda campaign against the left-wing Cartel des Gauches. As the *commissaire général* based in Strasbourg noted in a report,

*depuis les élections, la propagande de ce parti est devenue de plus en plus intense; la campagne déclenchée contre l'introduction des lois laïques ... et la suppression de l'école confessionnelle a amené un regain d'activité et de propagande.*¹¹⁵

It is impossible to give an accurate figure of the number of activists and followers of the Action Française since sources pertaining to the activities of the *ligue* in the Moselle do not provide this information. To add to the difficulty, the Action

¹¹² AN, Rapport du commissaire de police de Metz centrale, 6 novembre 1925, F7/13233.

¹¹³ Soucy, *French Fascism: The First Wave*, p.11.

¹¹⁴ AN, Rapport du commissaire central au directeur des services généraux de police d'Alsace et de Lorraine, Metz, 11 octobre 1930, F7/13204.

¹¹⁵ AN, Rapport du commissaire général de la République au chef du service central d'Alsace-Lorraine, Strasbourg, 27 octobre 1924, 30AJ229.

Française created fake membership lists designed to hide the names of its numerous members who preferred to keep their membership secret. These fake lists also existed in the Moselle.¹¹⁶

Of particular interest to this study was the *ligue's* position on regionalism. During a meeting of the Sarreguemines section, Joseph Ehrmann, a local activist, supported, as a police informer put it, '*le régionalisme, le rétablissement des anciennes provinces avec la représentation des corporations professionnelles ... et les Etats Généraux*'. The Action Française's support for the pre-1789 class-based *Etats Généraux* system, where the clergy and the aristocracy were over-represented compared to the rest of society, should come as no surprise from an organisation advocating the restoration of the monarchy and Catholicism as the state religion. Its position on regionalism, however, is particularly interesting as it highlighted the recognition of different cultural and historic regional entities within the French nation; a point which the regional Autonomist movement made the basis of its doctrine. But while the Action Française favoured the creation of a federative monarchy that would include the regions in a national collective, the Autonomists opted for the separation of Alsace-Lorraine from France. This difference was fundamental as by the mid-1920s the Autonomist movement known as the Heimatbund became the Action Française's arch-enemy.

The French government's decision to replace the old *haut-commissariat d'Alsace-Lorraine* with a new *direction générale des services d'Alsace et de Lorraine* in October 1925 – mainly for budgetary reasons – had significant consequences for those who favoured self-rule for Alsace and the Moselle. Before July 1925, the *haut-commissariat* had perpetuated to some extent the role of the *Reichsland's Statthalter* and granted the provinces a certain administrative autonomy vis-a-vis Paris. With the new *direction générale*, Strasbourg lost much of its administrative autonomy as well as its institutional and political authority over the provinces.¹¹⁷ Indeed, the central offices of the new institution were based in

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Paul Valot, a *conseiller d'état*, retained the position of *directeur de la direction des services d'Alsace et de Lorraine* until 1941. Despite the fact that Alsace and the Moselle were annexed by

Paris and three new *préfectures*, similar to those that existed in the rest of France, were also created: one for each of the *département's* capitals, Metz, Colmar and Strasbourg. Certain that the creation of the *direction générale* and the *préfectures* was the French government's first step towards complete assimilation, local autonomists organised politically and formed the Heimatbund.

As a movement that sought to capitalise on the local population's malaise and resentment against France's assimilation process, the Heimatbund turned the issue of regional identity, also known as *la question nationale* or *la question d'Alsace-Lorraine*, into a national and public issue. Though most contemporary observers associated the separatist movement with Alsace only, Autonomists were present in the Moselle and like their Alsatian counterparts they demanded autonomy for Alsace-Lorraine. A movement that transcended the traditional divide between left and right, the autonomist movement affected organisations such as the Action Française and even more so the Union Républicaine Lorraine.

The Heimatbund first came to light when it published a manifesto in the local press on 7 June 1926. In it, its founders, Alsatians for the most part, proclaimed themselves the true guardians of the region's identity and particularism. The manifesto did not speak of *Reichsland* or *département* but used the German word *Heimat* (homeland). In their manifesto, the men behind the Heimatbund commended '*les qualités de notre race et de notre langue ... le caractère, l'âme et la civilisation même du peuple alsacien-lorrain.*'¹¹⁸ In order to end what they saw as France's methodical spoliation of local customs and traditions, they demanded '*l'autonomie complète dans le cadre de la France*'. They supported the creation of an elected local assembly which would legislate on budgetary matters. A board of executives, selected by the people of Alsace-Lorraine, would sit in Strasbourg. Only they would be able to contact the French

Germany in July 1940, the institution existed in Périgueux until 1941. The French provisional government closed it officially in October 1944.

¹¹⁸ AN, Manifeste du Heimatbund, 'Appel à tous les Alsaciens-Lorrains', Strasbourg, 5 juin 1926, F7/13395.

parliament or government '*pour les questions françaises d'ordre général.*'¹¹⁹ Even if the Autonomists denied harbouring anti-French sentiments and nostalgia for the system under German rule, the institutional organisation of the autonomous Alsace-Lorraine resembled that of the Reichsland. As an article in *Le Messin* noted, '*Ce que veulent les autonomistes, c'est tout d'abord maintenir le «Reichsland» d'Alsace-Lorraine tel qu'il était délimité par le Traité de Francfort.*'¹²⁰

The Heimatbund's message was by no means new, for other organisations had raised the issue of an independent state of Alsace-Lorraine in the past. In November 1918, the Neutralistes, comprised largely of former members of the German Socialist party, favoured the creation of an independent state of Alsace-Lorraine that would act as a buffer state between France and Germany. In the words of Socialist and Alsatian Charles Hueber, '*Du Jura aux rives de la Moselle ne doivent exister qu'un peuple libre et un seul pays libre.*'¹²¹ In 1919, the short-lived autonomous party, the Parti Fédéraliste, also sought '*la création d'une république autonome d'Alsace-Lorraine*', as the future Autonomist Jean Dumser wrote in *Le Journal de Thionville*.¹²² Finally, as shall be examined later, the PCF also called for the independence of Alsace-Lorraine in 1925. The Heimatbund had its own publication, *Die Zukunft* (The Future), and many of its leaders had occupied high-ranking positions during the period of the *Reichsland*. For example, Alsatian Georges-Eugène Ricklin, the leader of the Heimatbund, had been the president of the *Reichsland's* Landtag and a deputy at the Reichstag. Though expelled from Alsace in 1919 for having collaborated with the Germans during the Great War, he somehow managed to return in 1920. In the Moselle, the movement was led by Victor Antoni, a local councillor and a former member of the Union Républicaine Lorraine from Fénétrange, a village located near Sarrebourg in the German-speaking zone. Though far more popular in Alsace, the Heimatbund was

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Claude Lorrain, 'Le Mouvement Autonomiste', *Le Messin*, 11 octobre 1925, p.1.

¹²¹ Jean Maitron (dir.), *Dictionnaire Biographique du Monde Ouvrier Français*, Tome XXXII, Paris: Les Editions Ouvrières, 1988, p.10.

¹²² Jean Dumser, *Journal d'un Autonomiste Alsacien-Lorrain*, Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1929, p.3.

briefly active in the southern and south-eastern rural cantons of the Moselle where it attracted a small number of loyal followers.¹²³

The Action Française was among the first to attack the Autonomists publicly. According to a *commissaire spécial*, the *ligue* announced its decision to disrupt all the Autonomist meetings in the Moselle two days after the publication of the Heimatbund's manifesto.¹²⁴ It also organised a meeting in Strasbourg where it hoped to gather between 15,000 and 18,000 supporters from the Moselle and Alsace.¹²⁵ The meeting, according to a police report, was organised by '*les chefs royalistes de Paris qui [sont] opposés à l'esprit autonomiste [et qui] escomptent produire une forte impression en faveur de leur parti.*'¹²⁶ The *départemental* section of the *ligue* also sought to combat the influence of the Heimatbund: M. Laugel, the president of the Metz section, proposed the formation of a group of German-speaking orators who would operate in the German-speaking cantons, precisely where the Autonomist movement existed.¹²⁷ But the Action Française did not have to fight the Heimatbund for long as the French government soon banned it and arrested its leaders on charges of high treason and conspiracy against the state. The accused, which included twenty-two Alsatians and no Mosellan, were tried in the criminal court of Colmar in May 1928.¹²⁸ While some of the accused were acquitted, others such as Ricklin received long prison sentences; Ricklin was finally amnestied by the French government in 1929.

The Union Républicaine Lorraine's attitude towards the Autonomists was more ambiguous than that of the Action Française. Despite its solid particularist and Catholic foundations, the Union Républicaine Lorraine was essentially Republican and rejected the autonomous ideas harboured by some within the

¹²³ AN, Cacaud papers, Rapport du commissaire général de la République au président du Conseil, 11 juillet 1924, 485AP6.

¹²⁴ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Strasbourg au préfet du Bas-Rhin, 9 juin 1926, F7/13395.

¹²⁵ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz, F7/13200

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ AN, Rapport du commissaire de police au commissaire central, Metz, 10 septembre 1925, F7/13201.

¹²⁸ For a transcript of the Colmar trials, see *Le procès du complot autonomiste à Colmar 1er-24 mai 1928, Comptes-rendus et débats*, Colmar: Alsatia, 1928.

party. But mirroring the party's historical divide between Francophone and German-speaking Catholics, friction between the two groups eventually led to a scission of the Union Républicaine Lorraine in 1927. On the one side, the party's Francophone leaders and *Le Lorrain* vigorously condemned the Autonomists. As Ritz wrote in a column in *Le Lorrain*,

*les revendications présentées par la ligue de la « Zukunft » constituent le plus pur séparatisme. Il n'existe pas de peuple alsacien-lorrain. Les Lorrains, même de langue allemande, n'ont nulle envie d'être les cireurs de bottes des autonomistes allemands.*¹²⁹

On the other, many Union Républicaine Lorraine members from the German-speaking zones sympathised with the Heimatbund. Following months of disagreement and before the Union Républicaine Lorraine's leadership's refusal to accept Autonomists within its ranks, a group of secessionists created the dissident Christlich-Soziale Partei (Social-Christian party), also known as Union Chrétienne. Once the voice of the Union Républicaine Lorraine in the German-speaking cantons, *Die Lothringer Volkszeitung* joined the Christlich-Soziale Partei. It was in fact in the Metz offices of the newspaper that the secessionist party was officially created on 10 November 1927, just in time for the April 1928 legislative elections.¹³⁰

Led by Antoni, the party, which had its central offices in Sarreguemines, never succeeded in establishing itself in Metz and the rest of the Francophone zone. As the 1928 election results indicate, the party won its highest scores in the rural zones around Forbach, Sarreguemines, Sarrebourg and Boulay, all of which were located in the German-speaking half of the *département*. It presented no candidate in the Francophone zones of Metz and Château-Salins or in the semi-Francophone industrial and rural areas surrounding Thionville. Though it is more than likely that the party found no suitable candidate to present in those areas, it is also possible that Antoni struck a deal with the Union Républicaine Lorraine's

¹²⁹ AN, Cacaud papers, extrait du journal *Le Lorrain*, nd, 485AP5.

¹³⁰ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial Wagner au préfet, Metz, 18 novembre 1927, F7/13225. Unless otherwise stated, all references to the 'préfet' refer to the préfet de la Moselle.

leaders in those parts of the *département*. Though it has not been possible to find any evidence supporting this claim for the 1928 elections, sources reveal that the two Catholic parties came to an agreement in 1932. Indeed a *commissaire*'s report noted in 1934 that '*M. Antoni ... a exprimé l'espoir que l'[Union Républicaine Lorraine] respecterait la signature de ses dirigeants, et, restant fidèle à l'accord de 1932, [que] la question de la solidarité chrétienne*' would be maintained.¹³¹

It is interesting to note that while the French attempted to modernise the administration of the three recovered *départements* by creating a central office in Paris and three local *préfectures*, one of the main and perhaps unanticipated consequences was the return to the Moselle of an old political model. As many local contemporary observers noted, by the late 1920s the *département*'s right-wing political landscape reverted to the model that had existed during the period of the *Reichsland*: a clerical German and Platt-speaking party on the one side and a more liberal Francophone party on the other.¹³² Additionally, it is clear that the rise of Autonomism and the subsequent creation of German-speaking clerical groups such as the Volksbund and the Christlich-Soziale Partei reflected the Moselle's divisions along linguistic and cultural lines. This suggests that despite the Union Républicaine Lorraine's initial plan to unite Francophone and German-speaking Catholics in a single party in 1918, linguistic and cultural divisions as well as a particular historic context proved an insurmountable obstacle to the conservatives' ambitions. As shall be demonstrated later in this study, the period of the Popular Front largely contributed in flattening these divisions but only by creating new divisions along political and socio-economic lines. Until the formation of the Popular Front, the two Catholic parties remained largely autonomous and refused formally to ally against the left. In the areas surrounding Sarreguemines, the supporters of the two parties regularly fought each other verbally and even physically. Indeed, the opposition between the two groups was so severe in some areas that during a meeting of the Volksbund in Sarreguemines, the Christlich-

¹³¹ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au directeur de la sûreté nationale, 31 août 1934, F7/13038.

¹³² AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial Wagner au préfet, Metz, 18 novembre 1927, F7/13225.

Soziale Partei announced it would support the PCF candidate against the Union Républicaine Lorraine's at the next legislative elections. Although ideologically opposed, the Christlich-Soziale Partei and the PCF shared one characteristic for most of the interwar period: the call for the independence of Alsace-Lorraine.

The Left

Like the right, the left in interwar Moselle drew its traditions and culture from its German predecessors. In the case of the left, these originated from the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), a party described by Donald Sassoon as 'the most successful socialist party' in Europe in the pre-1914 era.¹³³ As will be explained here, however, in the Moselle neither the SPD nor its post-1918 political heir were particularly successful.

Four years after the Frankfurt Peace Treaty, German Socialists united to form the SPD. Following two failed attempts on the life of Emperor Wilhelm I in early 1878, which Bismarck attributed to the Social Democrats, the conservative-led Reichstag voted the anti-Socialist laws aimed at the SPD. These anti-Socialist laws (*Sozialistengesetz*) had a mixed effect, including the imprisonment of many party activists but also increased militancy and effective exploitation of the Reichstag as a platform for propaganda. However, the SPD faced an almost insuperable obstacle in its efforts to gain support among workers in Alsace-Lorraine because it was regarded as a German party, and as Silverman writes, 'for the people of Alsace-Lorraine this was more important than the fact that it was also the party of the working man.'¹³⁴

Initially, French and German Socialists both claimed the *Reichsland* their exclusive territory and feuds occurred. But at the International Socialist Labour Congress in 1891, the delegates of the SPD and the French Socialists appeared in agreement over the question of Alsace-Lorraine. Both Wilhelm Liebknecht, representing the SPD, and Edouard Vaillant, speaking on behalf of the French

¹³³ Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism, The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, New-York: The New Press, 1996, p.9.

¹³⁴ Silverman, 'Political Catholicism and Social Democracy in Alsace-Lorraine', p.54

delegates, declared that the question of Alsace-Lorraine was artificial and only provoked difficulties between French and German Socialists. Their solution, as reported by *The Times* correspondent, was 'the spread of Socialism', which 'would sweep away the difficulty about Alsace and Lorraine.'¹³⁵ Daniel Ligou affirms that as neither party offered a solution to the issue both tacitly agreed to stop their operations in the *Reichsland*, which enabled a new generation of Mosellan-born Socialists to lead the movement. Being born after 1871, these new leaders knew little of French socialism and were suspicious of the SPD for being German. Consequently they developed a particular political consciousness that mixed themes of economic exploitation and national oppression.¹³⁶

By the eve of the First World War, the Mosellan Socialists had become well organised. With their Alsatian counterparts they created the Sozialdemokratische Partei Elsass-Lothringen in 1905. They had their own Central Committee and sections (*Ortsvereine*) in every corner of the *département*. In preparation for the 1911 Landtag elections, the region's Central Committee issued a propaganda leaflet that condemned '*la tutelle prussienne*', glorified '*le peuple d'Alsace-Lorraine*' and demanded the independence of the '*terre d'empire*'.¹³⁷ Unlike the Elsass-Lothringisches Zentrum and the Bloc Lorrain, which broadly accepted the fact that the Moselle was a part of the German Reich, Mosellan Socialists rejected the annexation. Indeed, Schleicher, Lothringen's leading Socialist figure, sustained the demand for the independence of Alsace-Lorraine by denouncing the German annexation up to 1914.¹³⁸ This demand, in one form or another, would become a feature of the Mosellan PCF between 1925 and 1935. But despite the local SPD's methodical organisation and its numerous pre-election meetings, and despite the blundering provocations of German army units in neighbouring Alsace, the party

¹³⁵ 'The Socialist Labour Congress at Brussels', *The Times*, 22 August 1891, p.5.

¹³⁶ Daniel Ligou, *Histoire du Socialisme en France (1871-1961)*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962, p.224. See also Alexandre Zévaès, *La Question d'Alsace-Lorraine et le Socialisme*, Paris: Editions du comité de propagande française républicaine et réformiste, 1918.

¹³⁷ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de police, 'Transmission d'un manifeste du parti socialiste alsacien-lorrain', Avricourt, 11 juillet 1911, F7/12503.

¹³⁸ See Charles Brocard, 'Le parti socialiste en Alsace-Lorraine', *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, Tome LXIV, avril-mai-juin 1910, pp.56-63.

failed to mobilise Lothringen blue-collar workers.¹³⁹ It gained no representative in the municipal assemblies, and its first and only deputy in the Reichstag was the Alsatian Georges Weill who won in Metz in 1912.¹⁴⁰

In November 1918, a few weeks before French troops entered Lorraine, French and Russian ex-prisoners of war and German workers and soldiers joined the German revolution. Amidst the confusion produced by the departure of the German civil and military authorities they formed councils (*Soldaten und Arbeiter Räte*) and took control of the municipalities of Metz and Thionville. Led by Charles Becker they proclaimed the free soviet Republic of Metz on 8 November 1918 and occupied the town hall for nine days.¹⁴¹ In the coal mining district of south-eastern Moselle, revolutionaries formed councils in Sarreguemines, Petite-Rosselle and Saint-Avold. Upon learning that Foch's armies were heading towards the region, they abandoned the town halls they had briefly occupied and made for the newly created German Republic. With regard to the Thionville occupation, French police refused to believe that French soldiers and workers were responsible for attempts at sovietisation. As a *commissaire* reported, '*Un sentiment commun les a réunis [les membres de ce mouvement avorté] et ce n'est pas un sentiment français.*'¹⁴² Although he did not see '*dans l'organisation des SOVIETS de la première heure trace d'une inspiration ou d'une aide exclusivement allemande*', he warned his superiors that '*Il pourrait en être autrement dans l'avenir.*' For Pierre Schill, however, the influence of German revolutionaries in the Moselle's southern

¹³⁹ The provocations relate to the Saverne affair, which occurred in the eponymous Alsatian town in late 1913 and early 1914. The crisis began after a young German army officer insulted the Alsatian population by calling them 'Wackes', a derogatory term used against French people among the border population of south-western Germany. Picked up by the local press, the incident led to massive protests in Alsace and a political crisis in Germany. At the heart of the issue was a power struggle between the Emperor and the military on one side and the Reichstag on the other. Additionally, as some historians suggest, the crisis provided the tense Franco-German diplomatic climate in which the July 1914 crisis developed; see Agnès Bouhet, 'L'Affaire Saverne, novembre 1913-janvier 1914: un exemple de conditionnement international indirect', *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains*, 44, 173, 1994, pp.5-17.

¹⁴⁰ Doctor Georges Weill left the Moselle and his seat at the Reichstag in 1914 to enrol in the French army. After the war, he settled in the Bas-Rhin where he won a deputy seat for the SFIO at the November 1919 legislative elections.

¹⁴¹ Maitron (dir.), *op.cit.*, Tome XVIII, p.324. In Metz, the revolutionaries painted the white crescent of a Turkish flag red and hoisted it on top of the town hall.

¹⁴² AN, Rapport du commissaire de police, Metz, 24 novembre 1918, F7/13377.

cantons was evident. As he wrote, '*Ces conseils, souvent animés par des Allemands, sont en fait très liés au mouvement révolutionnaire qui touche la Sarre.*'¹⁴³

In early 1919, the Mosellan Socialists joined the SFIO under the leadership of Charles Becker. It is unclear how many members the party counted at the time, but during an SFIO conference in Strasbourg in February 1919, party delegates issued an *ordre du jour* which confirmed their policy towards Mosellan regionalism:

*La conférence des délégués des fédérations Socialistes du Haut-Rhin, du Bas-Rhin et de la Moselle salue le retour à la France des départements arrachés à la nation par l'acte de violence contre lequel avait déjà protesté, en 1871 ... la démocratie socialiste du monde entier.... La conférence estime qu'Alsaciens et Lorrains doivent être placés le plus rapidement possible sous le régime du droit commun à tous les Français.... Elle s'élève, par conséquent, contre tout projet ... qui pourrait aboutir à créer un esprit de particularisme....*¹⁴⁴

Consistent with some of the SPD's previous statements, the Mosellan Socialists denounced the German annexation, but the endorsement of a rapid assimilation within the French Republic and the rejection of any *particularisme* were new to their rhetoric. From a doctrinal point of view, this was not entirely surprising as the SFIO was a loyal supporter of the French Republic and its accompanying values of secularism and indivisibility. What remains unclear, however, was why the Mosellan Socialists so readily agreed to follow the French party's line. After all, they had demanded independence for the region throughout the annexation period, denouncing both German and French imperialism, and many had also actively participated in the November 1918 German revolution.¹⁴⁵ Although very little is known about the shift from SPD to SFIO doctrine, a plausible factor may have been the fear many members must have had of being deported for allegedly

¹⁴³ Pierre Schill, 'Les mineurs de charbon de Moselle, la grève et la révolution au lendemain de la Première Guerre Mondiale (novembre 1918-octobre 1919)', *Les Annales de l'Est*, 2, 2000, p.362.

¹⁴⁴ ADBR, 'Ordre du jour vote à la conférence des délégués des fédérations socialistes du Haut-Rhin, du Bas-Rhin et de la Moselle, le 23 février 1919, à Strasbourg', 98AL673-2.

¹⁴⁵ Becker, who led the revolution in Metz in November 1918, became the leader of the Mosellan federation of the SFIO in 1919. It was therefore under his leadership that the federation advocated assimilation.

harbouring anti-French sentiments. Another factor may have been the disorganised state of the party in the immediate post-war period.

This disorganisation was reflected in the division between the party leadership and the rank and file, since the two seemed to have had different agendas. Indeed, an army informer reported a radicalisation of the Mosellan working classes in 1919 in favour of a pro-German revolutionary and secessionist line. As he stated: *'il existe en ce moment en Lorraine une propagande neutraliste et une propagande révolutionnaire. Toutes deux sont d'origine allemande et sont soutenues par les éléments allemands du pays.'*¹⁴⁶ But, according to the same informer, the Germans were not the only ones to blame: *'Dans le bassin de l'Orne (région de Metz) ... ce sont des éléments allemands et alsaciens qui dirigent les grèves et agitent tout le monde ouvrier. Ces alsaciens anciens soldats allemands ... sont bolchévistes et anti-français.'* A note at the bottom of the report indicates that *'L'incompatibilité d'humeur des Alsaciens et des Lorrains est connue.... La présence de ces Alsaciens qui sont très violents est pénible pour ces derniers.'* By contrast, the author describes the working-class population of the Moselle as *'sage, modérée, française et très patriote'*.

The anti-Alsatian sentiment among the Mosellan population and in Metz in particular was indeed strong. As Roth writes, *"Parmi les Messins et les Mosellans il y avait à l'époque un fort mouvement anti-alsacien"*.¹⁴⁷ But when it came to social unrest it appears that the French authorities were all too quick to equate German and dialect-speaking Alsatians and Germans with Socialism and political instability. Because the French expected to find Mosellans staunch patriots imbued with a spirit of *revanche*, and because any activity, political or otherwise, from Germany was considered hostile to French interests, military observers and officials in charge of the administrative reintegration of the *département* generally failed to grasp the complex relations between the Moselle, Alsace and Germany, and wrongly associated Francophone and German or Platt-speaking individuals

¹⁴⁶ AN, 'Rapport sur l'état des esprits en Lorraine', 2^e bureau, Metz, 17 octobre 1919, F7/13377.

¹⁴⁷ Roth, *Lorraine, France, Allemagne, Un Parcours d'Historien*, Metz: Editions Serpenoises, 2002, p.66.

with respectively Francophile and Germanophile sentiments. Similarly, the French blamed violent left-wing Alsatians for arousing an otherwise quiescent Moselle working class. This grossly inaccurate perception of events reflected the French view that Mosellans were French who had been held captive by Germany with the complicity of Alsace. It also led by extension to the belief that, as mentioned earlier, the assimilation of the Moselle would be easy compared to that of Alsace.

For Millerand, the *haut-commissaire* for Alsace-Lorraine, the situation with regard to social unrest was different and his perception was closer to reality. He believed that those responsible for the strikes of 1919-1920 were not foreigners but Lorrainers who, in his words, thought: '*on nous a débarrassé des allemands, maintenant il faut nous débarrasser des français, de ceux, du moins, qui ne parlent pas allemand, de manière que tous les postes nous reviennent.*'¹⁴⁸ In his view, the strikers were opportunists who aimed at saving jobs for German-speaking Mosellans and Alsatians. This was particularly evident in the state-owned railway sector where Mosellan workers resented the arrival of French civil servants and others, who according to Autonomist Jean Dumser '*[ne] connaissent [pas] nos langues et nos moeurs [et] ... dont nous espérons qu'ils retournent chez eux aussi tôt que possible.*'¹⁴⁹ Many workers in the railway industry were so intent on saving jobs for German-speaking locals that they joined the Heimatbund. Significantly, the latter's manifesto included the following demand: '*Nous exigeons ... l'autonomie complète du réseau des Chemins de fer d'Alsace et de Lorraine.*'¹⁵⁰

Fifteen years after its creation, the SFIO, meeting in Tours in December 1920, fatefully divided over affiliation to Lenin's Moscow-based Third International rather than rejoining the Second International. Having unanimously voted in favour of the Third International, all seventy-six representatives of the Mosellan section

¹⁴⁸ AN, Millerand papers, lettre de Millerand à Clémenceau, octobre 1919, 470AP114.

¹⁴⁹ Dumser, *op.cit.*, p.4.

¹⁵⁰ AN, Manifeste du Heimatbund, 'Appel à tous les Alsaciens-Lorrains', Strasbourg, 5 juin 1926, F7/13395. The French created the Compagnie des Chemins de fer d'Alsace et de Lorraine in 1919. It did so by confiscating and using the equipment and railway lines that had previously belonged to the Kaiserliche Generaldirektion der Eisenbahnen in Elsaß-Lothringen, which the Germans had created in 1871. The Compagnie des Chemins de fer d'Alsace et de Lorraine was absorbed in the national Société Nationale des Chemins de fer français (SNCF) in 1937.

joined the new Communist party which required them to obey the directives of the Comintern, the Third International's governing body. Becker, who later rejected the radicalism involved in this switch of allegiance, lost the leadership of the party to Emile Béron. The latter did not fully explain the reasons behind the Mosellans' decision to back the Third International, but he affirmed that '*les camarades [de la Fédération de la Moselle] ... ont voulu, par ce vote, reconstituer l'unité du parti*'.¹⁵¹ The Mosellan *secteur* of the new Communist party was attached to the Alsatian federation with regional headquarters in Strasbourg. But in order to strike a balance between Strasbourg and Metz, the latter hosted the operations necessary for the publication and distribution of the section's daily newspaper *Die Volkstribüne*.

Across France, the SFIO successfully recruited many new members after the split and soon surpassed the PCF as the largest party of the left. In contrast, the Mosellan Socialist federation failed to recover its lost activists and voters. At the May 1924 legislative elections, the Radical-Socialist and Socialist *Entente des Gauches* received a mere 7 percent of the votes while the Communist *Bloc Ouvrier et Paysan* gained 23 percent. Even in the late 1920s, the Metz section of the SFIO numbered only 86 members.¹⁵² Meanwhile, a police report from Sarreguemines confirmed that '*la section locale était complètement désintégrée et il est difficile aux Socialistes de recruter de nouveaux membres*'.¹⁵³ By then the ideological gulf separating the Socialists and the Communists seemed irreversible and the latter, by endorsing the Comintern's new sectarian tactics of class against class in 1928, launched a sustained attack on the SFIO as the '*parti de trahison, toujours aux côtés de la bourgeoisie contre la Révolution*'.¹⁵⁴

By the late 1920s the issue of Autonomism separated the two parties even further. An SFIO leader of the Mosellan federation firmly rejected any form of separation from France, declaring, '*Pour nous la question d'Alsace-Lorraine est*

¹⁵¹ Parti Socialiste SFIO, *18^e Congrès National tenu à Tours les 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 & 30 décembre 1920, Compte-rendu Sténographique*, Paris: Editions du parti socialiste SFIO, 1921, pp.64-65.

¹⁵² AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Metz, 21 janvier 1926, F7/13083.

¹⁵³ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines, novembre 1929, F7/13083.

¹⁵⁴ AN, tract du Parti Communiste SFIC, rayon de la Moselle, sous-rayon de Metz, nd, F7/13083.

résolue par le retour des trois provinces à la France, ratifié par le Traité de Versailles.' The Communist party in contrast supported the idea of an independent state of Alsace-Lorraine. Indeed, in September 1925, almost a year before the publication of the Heimatbund's manifesto, delegates of the regional section of the Communist party issued a programme that called for '*la libre disposition des masses populaires d'Alsace-Lorraine jusqu'à la complète séparation d'avec la France*', and claimed that the region suffered national oppression.¹⁵⁵ They called for the immediate evacuation of French civil and military authorities followed by the organisation of a plebiscite on the future of Alsace and the Moselle. Following the publication of the Heimatbund's manifesto in June 1926, the regional section of the PCF reiterated its call for independence and offered the Autonomist movement its full backing. Rod Kedward suggests that the PCF's separatist ideas and its sympathy towards the Heimatbund was not surprising since the party was 'responsive to autonomous ideas as an expression of working class discontent' and economic exploitation.¹⁵⁶ This may be true, but by advocating independence for the Moselle and Alsace, the party was also responding to what local Communists saw as national oppression and dismissal of their particular heritage. As Samuel Goodfellow maintains, with the call for independence the PCF 'endorsed the position that [Alsace-Lorraine] suffered under the dual oppression of the French nation and the bourgeoisie'.¹⁵⁷

But though the regional section of the party backed the Heimatbund, the Comintern's adoption of class against class tactics abruptly ruled out any association with bourgeois parties. In opposition to this line, delegates at the regional congress in Strasbourg in March 1929 concentrated their debate on the question of an electoral alliance with the Autonomists. They criticised the Central Committee's obsession with the class against class tactics and insisted that the elections in the Moselle would be played between what an unnamed local

¹⁵⁵ Maitron (dir.), *op.cit.*, Tome XXXII, p.10.

¹⁵⁶ Rod Kedward, *La Vie en Bleu: France and the French since 1900*, London: Penguin, 2005, p.197.

¹⁵⁷ Goodfellow, 'From Communism to Nazism: The Transformation of Alsatian Communists', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27, 2, April 1992, p.236.

Communist described as '*le front national et le front anti-impérialiste*'.¹⁵⁸ In agreement with his Alsatian colleagues, principally from the Bas-Rhin, Béron suggested '*des possibilités de manœuvre plus larges, avec des groupements autonomistes, petit-bourgeois radicalisants*'.¹⁵⁹ Perhaps because an alliance between Communists and Autonomists was used with success in Strasbourg - Communist Charles Hueber won the municipality from Socialist Jacques Peirottes with the support of the Autonomists – a schism developed between orthodox proponents of the party's line which rejected an electoral alliance and dissidents who favoured an alliance. Expelled from the party, the latter formed in October 1929 the dissident *Kommunistische Partei-Opposition* under Hueber's leadership.¹⁶⁰

The Mosellan Communists generally followed the party's line and Hueber's new party failed to gain many supporters in the *département*. As a party official stated after the regional conference, '*Dans la plupart des questions se forme un bloc de la Moselle ... à peu près sur la ligne du Comité Central*'.¹⁶¹ But there were some such as Béron who, like Hueber, favoured a rapprochement with the Autonomists. For Béron, striking an alliance with the Autonomists offered the party a chance to defeat what he thought were its real enemies: the Catholic right embodied by the Union Républicaine Lorraine. By playing the national minority card and sanctioning the question of national oppression, he hoped to attract the *département's* industrial workforce, who comprised largely Platt-speaking and German-speaking natives of the region.¹⁶² Indeed, in the mines surrounding Metz, Alsatians and Mosellans accounted for 75 percent of French workers; the rest were *Français de l'Intérieur*. In the large steelworks of Rombas and Hagondange, the rates were higher still: 82 percent for the first and 90 percent for the second. But, despite Béron's efforts, the Central Committee refused to alter its line. As

¹⁵⁸ ADSSD, 'Adjonction à la résolution du Comité Central et aux commentaires du secrétariat, Conférence de la région d'Alsace-Lorraine', Strasbourg, 23-24 mars 1929, 3Mi6/53 séquence 362.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Goodfellow, 'From Communism to Nazism', p.241.

¹⁶¹ ADSSD, 'Conférence de la région d'Alsace-Lorraine, 3Mi6/53 séquence 362.

¹⁶² ADM, Rapport mensuel du commissariat spécial Gare Centrale Metz, 15 février 1934, 301M56.

Charles Friedrich explained in the regional edition of *L'Humanité*, '*Tout le discours de notre camarade Béron est animé par cette grande idée que l'Alsace-Lorraine est une minorité nationale. Le fait est que la question d'Alsace-Lorraine est une question de classe.*'¹⁶³ Whether from conviction or more likely for tactical reasons, the party's Central Committee took the decision that the question of Alsace-Lorraine was simply a matter of class identity and economic oppression rather than national oppression and regional identity. Hence it would not sanction an alliance with a bourgeois party.

As the Strasbourg Communists allied with the Autonomists, the Metz section formed an alliance with the SFIO and the Radicals in order to defeat the Union Républicaine Lorraine list of Paul Vautrin at the May 1929 municipal elections. For Emile Fritsch, leader of the Metz section of the PCF, the victory of a left-wing alliance justified some compromise of party tactics. The Communists from Metz proclaimed that '*Pour battre Vautrin, il faut se réveiller plus tôt. Il a ses organisations politiques, religieuses, patriotiques et économiques.*'¹⁶⁴ With this announcement, the Metz section affirmed that its loyalty lay not with the partisan class against class tactics but with all the less well off in the *département*. As in Alsace, the national party responded decisively by expelling Fritsch from the party. As Charles Friedrich wrote in *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine*:

*Le mot d'ordre classe contre classe interdit toute négociation électorale avec d'autres partis et groupements électoraux. C'est là l'infraction à la discipline, le délit contre les décisions du parti, contre lequel les instances du parti doivent sévir avec une sévérité impitoyable.*¹⁶⁵

It would appear that in Metz the source of disagreement between local and national Communists had little to do with the question of national oppression. Instead, the Metz section acted against what it considered to be a tactical error that would ultimately lead to the victory of the right. On the eve of the 1929

¹⁶³ Charles Friedrich 'Pourquoi le front unique, tel qu'il a été réalisé à Metz, est contraire aux décisions de notre parti' *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine*, 15 mai 1929, p.1.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

elections, Fritsch had complained of the lack of support from the national party: *'De Paris, aucun appui, ni aucune directive'*¹⁶⁶ and in an internal report an unnamed official declared,

*Le niveau idéologique des membres de la région d'Alsace-Lorraine est en général assez bas pour les raisons suivantes: la région a été jusqu'à 1930 complètement coupée de la vie de l'ensemble du parti.*¹⁶⁷

The party demonstrated its awareness of the situation by creating an office in Paris devoted to strengthening links with the Alsace-Lorraine federation. Yet despite the presence of Jacques Doriot, a leading member of the Central Committee, in the governing body of the new office, the party closed the office barely a year after its creation.¹⁶⁸ The two main reasons it gave for its decision were the continuous lack of communication between Metz and Paris, and the financial costs of translating every document from French to German. The decision proved disastrous for the Mosellan Communists' confidence in the Parisian leadership. As Friedrich noted after the closing of the Paris office: *'pas un seul rapport concernant l'Alsace-Lorraine n'a été discuté par le Bureau Politique, le représentant de la région était complètement séparé du Comité Central'*, and *'nous avons eu des frais importants vu qu'il fallait tout traduire et imprimer en allemand. La même chose se reproduit à chaque élection, chaque événement politique, chaque manifestation.'*¹⁶⁹

The linguistic issue represented one of the main obstacles to bridging the gap between Paris and the Mosellan sections. Because many local Communist

¹⁶⁶ ADSSD, 'Lettre de Fritsch au camarade Dalhem', Metz, 25 mai 1929, 3Mi6/53 séquence 362.

¹⁶⁷ ADSSD, 'Rapport sur l'Organisation du Parti dans la région d'Alsace-Lorraine', n.d. but thought to be written in May or June 1935, 3Mi6/116 séquence 740.

¹⁶⁸ Doriot, whom the party sent to investigate the alliance with the clerical Autonomists in May 1929, condemned the Communists-Autonomists as 'opportunistic elements' that had been caught 'red-handed' in the forbidden act of allying themselves to the petty bourgeoisie.' In Goodfellow, 'From Communism to Nazism', p.240. As the author duly notes, Doriot himself later fell victim to the party's strict discipline when in 1934 he was expelled for instigating talks of unity with the SFIO.

¹⁶⁹ ADSSD, 'Mémorandum de la région Alsace-Lorraine au Comité Exécutif de l'Internationale Communiste à Moscou, Rapport sur la situation en Alsace-Lorraine et la proposition du comité régional sur l'indépendance du parti d'Alsace-Lorraine, 1^{ère} partie, 1931', signé Friedrich, 3Mi6/71 séquence 477.

leaders had grown up using German as their native language, it became difficult for the party to disseminate its message in the *département*. As Friedrich wrote in 1931, '*La centrale du parti ne pouvait pas nous aider à cause du problème de la langue. Nos dirigeants ne connaissent pas suffisamment le français pour pouvoir travailler les documents de la centrale.*'¹⁷⁰ In order to *franciser* the Mosellan leadership and forestall another schism of the party, the PCF decided to merge the Communist-backed Mosellan Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire (CGTU) trade union with that of neighbouring Francophone Meurthe-et-Moselle. But the fusion of the two organisations into the CGTU Région de l'Est, which was intended to strengthen the link between Metz and Nancy and remove Metz from the influence of Germanophile elements, aroused many complaints from Mosellan members. The latter rejected their separation from German-speaking colleagues in Alsace, and after one year of what Friedrich described as '*l'impossibilité de communiquer ... entre les syndicats lorrains et ceux de Nancy*', the party dissolved the union.¹⁷¹

Weary of what they considered a lack of understanding and interest, the Mosellan Communists addressed a letter to the executive committee of the Comintern in Moscow, asking for the total independence of the Communist federation of Alsace-Lorraine:

*Nous adressons la demande au Comité Exécutif de l'Internationale Communiste de nous accorder l'indépendance à la région d'Alsace-Lorraine, l'indépendance politique, organisation financière, avec un Comité Central propre, une liaison directe avec l'IC avec le maintien d'une meilleure liaison avec le PCF.*¹⁷²

Because they believed the PCF ignored or failed to appreciate the Moselle's particular context, Mosellan Communists thought that by establishing a regional party free of the PCF's direct authority they might have more success.

¹⁷⁰ ADSSD, 'Mémorandum de la région Alsace-Lorraine au Comité Exécutif de l'Internationale Communiste à Moscou, Rapport sur la situation en Alsace-Lorraine et la proposition du comité régional sur l'indépendance du parti d'Alsace-Lorraine, 2^{ème} partie, 1931', signé Friedrich, 3Mi6/71 séquence 477.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

Although audacious, as it challenged the party's line of unity and strict obedience to the Comintern's directives, the request for independence had formed part of Socialist discourse in both the pre and post-Versailles era and was therefore scarcely novel. During both periods, the Socialists, and later the Communists, had called for the creation of an independent state of Alsace-Lorraine that would act as a bridge between France and Germany. The Communists' request of 1931 was essentially similar: by creating an independent national party, they hoped Alsace-Lorraine would serve as the link between French and German Communists. Although the Comintern's response to the letter does not appear in the party archives, its substance need not be doubted for no regional party was ever founded.

The Mosellan Communists' call for independence or secession is significant to this study as it reveals their troubled and somewhat desperate situation in the late 1920s and early 1930s. More than a decade after the return of the *département* to French sovereignty and the formation of the French Communist party, the issues of language and the associated crisis of national identity remained unresolved. Similarly, the request for the creation of what was in effect a German-speaking party within the recovered provinces challenged the PCF's view that the question of Alsace-Lorraine was solely a matter of class exploitation and remained a subject of disagreement between local and national party representatives until the introduction of the Popular Front strategy. Although the Mosellan federation continued to follow the party's class against class tactics, the disagreement led to what an unnamed party official described as sabotage.

Indeed, the same official reported how not a soul attended the public party meetings he organised in the industrial towns of Aumetz and Merlebach in late 1931: '*A Aumetz, j'ai convoqué une réunion à laquelle beaucoup de mineurs étaient avertis, mais personne n'y vint.... A Merlebach, une réunion avait été prévue le dimanche à 10h, mais après 1h30 d'attente il n'y avait personne.*'¹⁷³ The

¹⁷³ ADSSD, 'Lettre au secrétariat de la région d'Alsace-Lorraine', 27 octobre 1931, 3Mi6/71 séquence 478.

official concluded: '*J'ai l'impression que les responsables locaux ont intentionnellement saboté la réunion pour prouver qu'il était impossible de faire quoi que ce soit dans la contrée.*' If his explanation was correct, it would indicate that some local Communists were so disaffected as to be willing to sabotage the PCF's official propaganda work. While the Aumetz and Merlebach episodes suggest a genuine disagreement between Paris and the Moselle, however, it did not produce a total rupture between the Mosellan federation and the national party. And despite Jean Maitron's justified claims that '*les Communistes d'Alsace-Lorraine étaient en disaccord avec la tactique « classe contre classe »*'¹⁷⁴ there were enough loyal activists to follow the party's line in attacking verbally and sometimes physically the SFIO leaders.¹⁷⁵

But in April 1932, the Mosellan Communists faced yet another crisis when the PCF expelled the deputies Emile Béron and Victor Doebélé from the party. Coming barely a month before the legislative elections, this was a risky decision, especially as they were the only two Communist deputies in the *département*. The official explanation was that they were expelled for delaying the payment of their *cotisations parlementaires* to the party. Although little is known of the party's true motives, it is likely that Emile Béron and Victor Doebélé, who both came from an old Socialist and particularist background, disagreed with the bolshevisation and Stalinisation of the party in the early 1930s. It was during this period that Maurice Thorez became the party's secretary-general with the task of imposing the Comintern's directives in the strictest manner. Both Béron and Doebélé were popular figures among local Communists and were re-elected in their respective constituencies under the banner *Gauche Indépendante* in May, thus depriving the PCF of any parliamentary representation in the *département* and almost halving the Communist vote. Béron was re-elected with 8,446 votes; René Schwob, his Communist opponent and a leader of the CGTU, received merely 147.¹⁷⁶ In

¹⁷⁴ Maitron (dir.), *op. cit.*, quatrième partie, Tome XXXII, p.11.

¹⁷⁵ Various police informants reported that the Communists' campaign against the SFIO manifested itself in constant and sometimes violent disruptions of Socialist meetings (AN, F7/13083).

¹⁷⁶ Lachapelle, *Elections Législatives 1^{er} et 8 mai 1932*, Paris: Le Temps, 1932, p.178.

Forbach, Deoblé was also re-elected with 6,349 votes against Philippi's 380.¹⁷⁷ Mirroring the bleak situation of the party at the national level, the dismissal of the two deputies also led to a sharp decline in party membership in the *département*.¹⁷⁸ The dismissals, the decline in membership and the workers' continued refusal to join the party left the Mosellan PCF in a serious crisis. In his monthly report to the *préfet*, a *commissaire spécial* from Metz wrote,

*A Metz et dans sa banlieue, le parti Communiste traverse une crise; les plus convaincus montrent de l'indifférence et ne s'intéressent que fort peu à la vie du parti. Les réunions, très espacées, ne réunissent que quelques désœuvrés qui manquent ... d'enthousiasme.*¹⁷⁹

But despite a period characterised by internal tensions and conflicts and crises, the PCF nonetheless remained the largest left-wing political force in the Moselle in terms of votes. Why was the PCF even now much stronger than the SFIO? Firstly, the workers probably identified more with the Communist party. Like most of the workers, the party leaders originated from the Moselle and neighbouring Alsace.¹⁸⁰ Besides, while French was reintroduced into schools and institutions in 1919, the majority of the adult working population had grown up in a German-speaking environment, and local Communist leaders, who lived in the industrial areas between Thionville and Metz and who wrote extensively in the bilingual but mostly German *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine*, were predominantly German or Platt speaking. Secondly, the PCF made the question of Alsace-Lorraine and national oppression one of its key tenets. This was probably intended to reassure the workers who were anxious during the period of integration into France. In particular, this was almost certainly true for the railway workers of Montigny-lès-Metz who supported the PCF and the creation of an independent

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.176.

¹⁷⁸ The party's membership decreased from 109,000 in 1921 to 31,500 in 1930 and 28,800 in 1933; in Jean-Jacques Becker et Gilles Candar (dir.), *Histoire des gauches en France*, Volume 2, Paris: La Découverte, 2004, p.55.

¹⁷⁹ ADM, Rapport mensuel du commissariat spécial Gare Centrale Metz, 12 octobre 1932, 301M56.

¹⁸⁰ The main leaders of the Mosellan section were Alsatian-born and Mosellan-bred Emile Fritsch, Mosellan Marcel Kirsch and Mosellan Charles Friedrich nicknamed *l'homme de Moscou* because of his intransigent loyalty to the Comintern.

railway company of Alsace-Lorraine to replace the existing state-owned one; a demand that the Communist *départemental* section and the Heimatbund shared.

By contrast, the SFIO eschewed support for all forms of regional particularism. This had its origins with the pre-war leader, Jean Jaurès, whose model of society incorporated Socialist and democratic practices. Paul Féry, the secretary-general of the post-war Mosellan federation, was a Francophone *Français de l'Intérieur*, born in Sedan. The sections were located mostly in the urban areas around Metz, Thionville, Forbach and Sarreguemines, and the party's monthly publication *La Bataille*, while formally bilingual, was written chiefly in French.¹⁸¹ Despite advocating bilingualism in schools the party's agenda was unequivocal: assimilation of the *département* into the French Republic.¹⁸² Like the PCF, however, the SFIO faced a crisis that destabilised its already weak Mosellan section, when the Néo-socialistes broke with the party in 1933.¹⁸³ Despite the party's claim that '*le départ des Néos n'avait en rien troublé la fédération de la Moselle*', various police sources reveal that the split did in fact destabilise it.¹⁸⁴ One report stated that '*Il y a désaccord au sein [du parti Socialiste] depuis la création du parti des Socialistes de France*'¹⁸⁵, and another that '*les scissions qui se sont produites depuis la constitution du parti des Socialistes de France ... [ont] jeté la perturbation parmi les membres des sections mosellanes*'.¹⁸⁶

With regards to local trade unions, their membership after 1918 fared hardly better than the PCF's and the SFIO's. By the end of 1918, Eugène Imbs, the secretary of the carpenters' trade union of Alsace-Lorraine in the Reichsland,

¹⁸¹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet de la Moselle, Metz, 29 décembre 1934, 98AL683.

¹⁸² AN, Rapport du commissariat spécial Gare Centrale Metz, 30 octobre 1926, F7/13083.

¹⁸³ Despite the SFIO's victories alongside the Radicals at the 1924 and 1932 legislative elections, the party leadership refused to enter the Radical-led governments. A dissident group of Socialist deputies, led by Marcel Déat, challenged this policy as well as the party's Marxist doctrine. They entered into open conflict with the party leadership at the July 1933 party congress and were expelled in November 1933. Déat and his disciples formed their own party, the Parti Socialiste de France also known as Néo-socialistes or Néos.

¹⁸⁴ Paul Féry, 'Le Congrès Fédéral de la Moselle s'est tenu à Metz le 4 février dernier', *La Bataille*, mars 1934, p.2.

¹⁸⁵ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz, 8 novembre 1934, 24Z15.

¹⁸⁶ ADBR, Rapport du préfet de la Moselle, Metz, 29 décembre 1934, 98AL683.

organised the adhesion of the regional trade unions to the French Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT).¹⁸⁷ After the 1920 Tours congress, the federation of Lorraine of the CGT chose to follow the PCF and joined the CGTU in 1922.¹⁸⁸ But despite an active propaganda campaign on the part of the CGT and the CGTU throughout the 1920s and early 1930s and while the *départements* of the Nord, the Seine and the neighbouring Meurthe-et-Moselle, with similar levels of industrialisation, claimed almost half a million members in those three areas alone in 1931, Mosellan workers showed almost no interest in joining trade unions (Table 1).

Table 1 Level of unionisation in 1931

<i>Département</i>	Total industrial workforce (1)	Total industrial workers in trade unions (2)	Percentage
Nord	427,000	150,000	35%
Seine (Paris & suburbs)	910,000	295,000	32%
Meurthe-et-Moselle	130,000	17,000	13%
Moselle	157,000	3,600	3%

Sources: (1) Statistique Générale de la France, *Annuaire Statistique, 48e Volume, 1932, 2^e partie*, p.114. (2) Statistique générale de la France, *Résultats statistiques du recensement général de la population effectué le 8 mars 1931, Tome I, Troisième partie*, p.176

Police officials often reported local trade union leaders' concerns about this state of affairs. According to a *commissaire spécial* from Metz, René Schwob, secretary-general of the Ouvriers Métallurgistes de Lorraine (metalworkers union), complained that '*trop peu d'ouvriers métalliers participent aux réunions*'; and Marcel Kirsch, secretary-general of the Syndicats Unitaires de Lorraine, affiliated to the national CGTU, repeatedly acknowledged the '*manque d'activité et d'initiative des camarades*'.¹⁸⁹ A Communist official described the failure of the

¹⁸⁷ Pierre Schill, 'Entre France et Allemagne: grèves et mouvement ouvrier mosellans (1918-1923)', *Cahiers d'Histoire Espace Marx*, 92, 2003, p.116.

¹⁸⁸ Confédération Générale du Travail, *La Fédération Nationale des Syndicats, La Fédération des Bourses du Travail...*, Paris: Confédération Générale du Travail, 1925, p.540.

¹⁸⁹ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Metz, 21 septembre 1928, F7/13114.

party's propaganda campaign to recruit new members for the metalworkers' union in 1928: '*parmi les ouvriers français il y a une certaine indifférence vis-à-vis de l'organisation syndicale.... [A]u cours de cette tournée, nous avons touché 10,000 ouvriers, mais n'avons obtenu que 40 adhésions.*'¹⁹⁰

On the face of it, the Moselle, with its 170,000-strong industrial workforce (60 percent of the total workforce) seemed an ideal place for left-wing political activism to thrive.¹⁹¹ How then did the conservative Union Républicaine Lorraine manage to emerge consistently and comfortably victorious in a region that counted such a large industrial workforce? And how despite the presence of numerous large steelworks and mines, workers took little part in left-wing social and political movements? Firstly, the Moselle's linguistic barrier combined with the presence of a large number of foreign immigrants led to the deepening of the aforementioned cultural and linguistic rift. The main consequence of this rift was the division of the industrial workforce along linguistic and socio-cultural lines which hindered the development of the left-wing goals of class homogeneity and identity. Indeed, workers rarely identified themselves according to political class but rather according to their linguistic and cultural background. As indicated earlier in this chapter, police sources reveal that foreign workers generally preferred to join associations that focused on the protection of their own national interests. The PCF was aware of the disadvantage of such a large immigrant workforce. As a party report observed, '*la concentration de la main d'œuvre étrangère [résultait dans] un manque de perspective de lutte*'.¹⁹²

The second and without doubt the most important factor was the influence of Catholic doctrine and the local Catholic clergy upon the workers and the population in general. *Precisely* because it was closely associated with the Church, the Union Républicaine Lorraine won a majority of the seats at the

¹⁹⁰ ADSSD, 'Rapport sur le travail effectué dans le bassin métallurgique de la Moselle', unsigned, 1928, 3Mi6/45 séquence 305.

¹⁹¹ Statistique générale de la France, *Résultats Statistiques du Recensement Général de la Population effectué le 8 mars 1931*, Tome I, Troisième partie, p.13.

¹⁹² ADSSD, 'Co-rapport du camarade Barette sur la région, 9 novembre 1935', 3Mi6/117, séquence 741.

National Assembly and the Senate between 1919 and 1932. It also won control of the *départemental* assembly (*Conseil Général*) at every local election and just over 90 percent of the municipalities (707 out of 764) at the 1935 municipal elections. These electoral victories are highly significant for the present study, for they indicate firstly that nearly half a century of industrialisation and the accompanying changes in the Moselle's socio-economic landscape had practically no influence upon the region's political character, and secondly that the Catholic faith and clergy had become intrinsically bound up with Mosellan cultural and political identity. They also reveal to some extent that a left dominated by the extremist and sectarian PCF had little chance of attracting mass support among the electorate. This makes it easier to understand how the concepts of class consciousness and class struggle, which formed the basis of the left's doctrine, made so little headway among Mosellan workers. The Mosellan Communist leadership, while recognising the linguistic and particularist obstacles, could not persuade the national leadership or the Comintern of their importance, and faced the additional problem that its rival for influence among the working classes, the SFIO, favoured national integration and hence could contribute little within a regional united front. Only the right-wing Union Républicaine Lorraine was able consistently to concentrate on the questions of regional identity and *particularisme*, a question that crossed class and party divisions, and reaped the rewards for doing so.

Conclusion

In 1934, when the first steps were taken to form the Popular Front, the right still dominated the local political scene. On the one hand, the Union Républicaine Lorraine, which epitomised the region's *particularisme*, took advantage of the population's anxiety and malaise towards the French assimilation process. Able to reach a large section of the population through the Action Catholique Lorraine and a loyal network of priests, it tackled issues most dear to all Mosellans such as the Concordat and religious education. Above all, its approach to social and political issues based on the writings of the Church facilitated the adhesion of a population loyal to the Catholic faith. As it had done during the German annexation and after the province's return to French sovereignty, the clergy and Catholicism acted as

defenders of Mosellan identity. In other words, the Moselle's distinct historical context and the presence of an organised clergy largely conditioned its political character.

On the other hand, the left failed to mobilise the Moselle's large population of blue-collar workers. From the outset, the SFIO had little chance of succeeding. Indeed, as it was formed on the basis of the French Republican model, its doctrine had little appeal in a region with almost no Republican tradition. As the largest left-wing political force in the *département*, at least in terms of votes, the PCF had the potential to mobilise the working classes. But, as indicated above, the division of the Moselle's multi-layered society along linguistic and cultural lines prevented the penetration of the concepts of class homogeneity and consciousness; two concepts necessary for the development of the Communist doctrine. What is more, neither the indigenous nor the immigrant workers displayed much interest in left-wing political activism. A *commissaire spécial's* report offers an explanation as to the workers' lack of enthusiasm for left-wing political parties: '*en dépit d'une propagande active, les partis politiques de gauche ont beaucoup de difficulté à s'établir. La majorité des votants sont conservateurs et excessivement cléricaux.*'¹⁹³ For *The Times* correspondent, '[the people of Alsace-Lorraine] were stolid and solid, conservative and slow. It is not in their disposition to change. Their religion and their education have always been at the command of the clergy.'¹⁹⁴ When the French left began to mobilise in the Popular Front in 1934 in order to stop the fascist threat that had threatened the Republic in Paris on 6 February, the Mosellan left was weak and in no position to unite to defeat the dominant Catholic right.

¹⁹³ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines, 5 décembre 1932, F7/13083.

¹⁹⁴ 'Religion in Alsace and Lorraine, a Problem for M. Herriot', *The Times*, 19 August 1924, p.19.

Chapter Two - The Formation of the Popular Front, February 1934 - March 1936

Introduction

On 6 February 1934 thousands of right-wing demonstrators gathered in Paris to protest against the Republic and the government. In response to this violent demonstration, which many on the left considered a failed fascist coup, the PCF and the SFIO as well as the CGT and the CGTU organised separate demonstrations across the country on 12 February. Then, in a spontaneous and collective display of unity against fascism the Communist and Socialist rank-and-file protesters shouted in unison 'Down with fascism!' and 'Unity now!' By examining these events and the effect they had both on the left and the right, this chapter will seek to answer two questions: 1) what was particular about the formation of the Popular Front in the Moselle? 2) What does it reveal about the Moselle after fifteen years under French sovereignty?

Since the events of the 6th and the 12th contributed to the unification of the left in a Popular Front, the first part of this chapter will offer a summary account of those events and their significance at the national and local levels. Following the same model, the second part will examine the left's successes and difficulties in the creation of the Popular Front. Finally, the third part will explore the same events as viewed by the right.

Part One: 6 and 12 February 1934

Between 9 January and 6 February 1934, the Parisian police reported eleven major demonstrations organised by far-right *ligues* such as the Action Française, the Jeunesses Patriotes and the Croix de Feu.¹⁹⁵ By and large, those demonstrations were due to the general malaise which characterised France from the early 1930s. The malaise was due to the global economic slump and the rise

¹⁹⁵ APPP, Rapport du service des affaires de sûreté générale, 9 mars 1934, BA1853.

of fascism in Germany, Austria and elsewhere. The effect was to increase insecurity in France and dissatisfaction with the apparently ineffectual Radical-led governments in France, which erupted into violence when the Stavisky affair raised suspicions of corruption as well as incompetence in high places. Alexandre Stavisky was a Ukrainian-born financier and a Jew, who emigrated in 1898 to France where he engaged in lucrative but dubious financial activity. In 1932, with the assistance of Radical-Socialist Joseph Garat, deputy and mayor of Bayonne, he again organised the selling of false savings certificates by the Crédit Municipal bank. Stavisky's career as a crook did not start with this affair but each time he had benefited from the support of the authorities and had his trials postponed. In July 1933, the police were informed of the fraud and arrested the director of the bank in December. They rapidly linked the affair to Stavisky and his Radical-Socialist backers, and began to search for him. Eventually they found him in a chalet in Chamonix on 8 January 1934, where he died before he could be arrested. The police reported that he had committed suicide, but sceptical observers suspected a governmental cover-up. *Le Canard Enchaîné's* front page of 10 January mockingly read, '*Stavisky se suicide d'un coup de revolver qui lui a été tiré à bout portant.*'¹⁹⁶

The French, confronted with yet another political and financial scandal, appeared impatient for justice, but Camille Chautemps, head of the Radical government, refused to launch an enquiry that might shed light on the affair. The right and the *ligues* accused Chautemps of trying to protect his brother-in-law, the *procureur général* responsible for repeatedly delaying Stavisky's appearance in court since 1927, and they seized the opportunity to demand his resignation. On 30 January, after a month of incessant violent protests on the streets of Paris, Chautemps presented his resignation to President Albert Lebrun, who invited another Radical, Edouard Daladier, to form a government.¹⁹⁷ The right-wing press had successfully turned the affair into a political scandal and called for an

¹⁹⁶ *Le Canard Enchaîné*, 10 janvier 1934, p.1.

¹⁹⁷ From 9 January to 5 February 1934, the *ligues'* ten large demonstrations led to a total of 2,079 arrests and hundreds of injured among the demonstrators and the police forces. APPP, Rapport du service des affaires de sûreté générale, 9 mars 1934, BA1853.

immediate change of regime. But some on the left accused Jean Chiappe, *préfet de police* of the Seine, of being too moderate with the *ligues* and criticised his friendship with Taittinger and right-wing members of Paris municipal assembly. On 3 February Daladier ordered Chiappe to leave his position as *préfet*. Chiappe angrily responded by warning Daladier, '*Révoquez-moi si vous le désirez et vous me trouverez dans la rue.*'¹⁹⁸ The *ligues*, outraged by his dismissal, claimed that the country was in danger and called for their members to gather in different places in Paris on the evening of the 6th in order to demonstrate against Daladier and his government. Police sources reported the presence of seven major political organisations,¹⁹⁹ all right-wing but for the Communist-backed veterans' association Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants (ARAC).²⁰⁰ After a night of violent clashes between demonstrators and police forces which saw the erection of barricades in the centre of the French capital, Paris counted its victims.

Official reports confirm as well as hundreds of injured on both sides seventeen dead among the demonstrators and one from the police forces.²⁰¹ The right-wing press widely condemned the government for having fired upon the demonstrators: *La Libre Parole*'s headline of the 7th read, '*On a tiré sur le peuple*'.²⁰² Daladier came under pressure from Léon Blum, the Socialist leader, who encouraged him to resist demands to resign, and from Herriot and Radical ministers on the other side, who feared more violence if the government were to remain in place. He offered his resignation to President Lebrun in the afternoon of 7 February. That same evening, Gaston Doumergue agreed to form a new government of national unity, which included the Radical Albert Sarraut, the ex-SFIO and neo-Socialist Adrien Marquet and right wingers such as André Tardieu

¹⁹⁸ AN, Daladier papers, 'Chronologie des événements du 29 janvier au 7 février 1934', 496AP5.

¹⁹⁹ APPP, Rapport de police, Paris, 7 février 1934, BA1853. The reports listed the following organisations: Action Française, Solidarité Française, Fédération des Contribuables, Jeunesses Patriotes, Croix de Feu, Union Nationale des Combattants, ARAC.

²⁰⁰ On 6 February *L'Humanité* called on the members of the ARAC to gather and demonstrate against the parliamentary regime and the *ligues*, p.1.

²⁰¹ Chambre des Députés, *Rapport général ... du 6 février 1934*, Tome 1, p.226.

²⁰² *La Libre Parole*, février 1934, p.1.

and Philippe Pétain.²⁰³ In the name of the party truce, the Radicals supported the government. Broadly speaking nonetheless it marked the return of the right to power where it remained until January 1936 when the Radicals, under the influence of Daladier, decided to join the left-wing Communist-Socialist alliance in a Popular Front.

The motives and objectives of the demonstrators on 6 February have been the subject of much controversy. Most contemporary observers believed they had witnessed an attempted coup d'état. Despite the demonstrators' use of slogans such as '*A bas les voleurs*', '*Démission*' and '*A bas la République*', and their attempt to force their way into the National Assembly building, most historians reject the claim that this was an organised attempt by the right to overthrow the Republic. At most, the demonstrators were looking to replace the Radical-Socialist government with one of national unity where the right would have its place. According to Serge Berstein, those events were a political manoeuvre of the parliamentary right who sought through the protesters to bring down Daladier's government and install a right-wing government in its place. He interprets 6 February as '*une crise très profonde de la République parlementaire*', but not '*un complot fasciste contre le régime*'.²⁰⁴ As for Rod Kedward, 'the violent protests of 6 February were planned and orchestrated, but there was no strategy or even vision of a coup d'état, and no leader waiting to take power.'²⁰⁵

To the contemporary observers nonetheless the threat to the Republic was real enough. When asked 'was the Republic in danger?' the special commission of enquiry set up to look into the events of 6 February replied with a firm '*Oui!*'²⁰⁶ According to the commission, '*la République était en danger parce-que le Parlement a été attaqué*', and '*chaque fois que la gauche gagnait les élections, la droite organisait des campagnes antiparlementaires*' in order to discredit the

²⁰³ Gaston Doumergue was President of the Republic between 1924 and 1931. Politically, he belonged to the centre-right and declared himself the heir of Raymond Poincaré.

²⁰⁴ Berstein, *La France des Années 30*, p.75.

²⁰⁵ Kedward, *op.cit.*, p.168.

²⁰⁶ Chambre des Députés, *Rapport général ... du 6 février 1934*, Tome 4, p.54.

regime.²⁰⁷ It referred to the 1924 and 1932 general elections, which the left (Socialists and Radical-Socialists) had won and to the ensuing anti-parliamentary campaigns instigated by the *ligues*. Blum favoured the coup d'état theory when he claimed that '*les partis de réaction ... tentent aujourd'hui le coup de force*'²⁰⁸ and that the attempt to overthrow the regime '*n'a pas atteint son but stratégique qui était d'envahir la Chambre [des députés] et imposer ... un gouvernement provisoire ... que les ligues auraient ... contrôlé et dominé.*'²⁰⁹ Daladier, in an unpublished '*Appel au Peuple Français*', claimed that '*un coup d'état a ensanglanté ... PARIS.... [D]es factieux ont organisé un coup de force pour établir en France un régime de dictature.*'²¹⁰ Edouard Depreux, the Socialist Minister of Justice in 1937-1938, wrote that '*ceux qui n'ont pas vécu cette période ne peuvent s'imaginer ce que fut la violence des attaques déclenchées contre la démocratie à propos de l'affaire Stavisky*'.²¹¹ The police claimed that the *ligues* had undertaken '*une véritable organisation de [leurs] troupes*'²¹² and the apolitical League of Human Rights, which launched its own enquiry, concluded that the riots of the 6th were a serious attempt to overthrow the Republic.²¹³ The riots of 6 February sent the left the wake-up call it needed. It was time to reconsider headquarters' strategy.

If 6 February belonged to the right and the *ligues*, 12 February belonged to the left and in Kedward's words, 'made instant history no less than the riots of the 6th.'²¹⁴ Just a few days earlier the Communists had refused to unite with the Seine federation of the SFIO in a common demonstration and organised their own march against fascism.²¹⁵ Through *L'Humanité*, they encouraged all workers to demonstrate on the 9th in the Place de la République against fascism and the

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.61.

²⁰⁸ Blum, *L'Œuvre, 1934-1937*, p.9.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.13.

²¹⁰ CHSPO, Genebrier papers, '2ème ministère Daladier, "Le 6 février 1934"', GE2.

²¹¹ Edouard Depreux, *Souvenirs d'un Militant*, Paris: Fayard, 1972, p.78.

²¹² Chambre des Députés, *Rapport général ... du 6 février 1934*, Tome 2, p.1322.

²¹³ CHSPO, Genebrier papers, 'Le Front Populaire', (chronologie), GE5.

²¹⁴ Kedward, *op. cit.*, p.169.

²¹⁵ Zyromski and Pivert, leaders of the SFIO section of the Seine and representatives of the left of the SFIO, had proposed a joint action to the Communists for the 8th, but the latter refused.

government.²¹⁶ That evening, thousands of Communist protesters and a few Socialist activists gathered at République and on the surrounding boulevards, mixing cries of '*A bas les fusilleurs Daladier-Frot!*' with '*Pour la dissolution des ligues fascistes!*' and '*A bas l'Union Nationale Réactionnaire et Fasciste préparée par le Parti Radical et les Partis Socialistes!*'. But the Communists' demonstration was forbidden by the Préfecture and severely repressed by the police.²¹⁷ Despite the party's hopes of promoting unity from below, that is to say drawing the rank and file away from their Socialist affiliation, and despite *L'Humanité's* claim that the demonstration was a '*magnifique manifestation de front unique*', the 9th failed to bring the left together.²¹⁸ It was the call of the CGT for a general strike on the 12th that marked the first real step towards unity.

First the SFIO under the initiative of Blum and the left of the party, then the PCF and the CGTU decided to join the CGT on the 12th. On that day France's four largest political and social organisations united in a one-day strike and demonstrations comprising around one hundred thousand people in Paris alone. Two processions of demonstrators left from different locations: the SFIO/CGT from Place de la République and the CGTU/PCF from Place de la Bastille converged on Place de la Nation. Putting aside their enmity, activists from the two parties and the two unions met, shook hands and rallied to the cries of '*Unité maintenant!*' Léon Blum, speaking to demonstrators gathered in the Cours de Vincennes, declared,

*Citoyens, la preuve est faite. La province toute entière, Paris, rassemblées dans cette manifestation signifie aux hommes du fascisme et du royalisme qu'ils ne passeront pas. La réaction ne passera pas. Vive l'unité prolétarienne sans laquelle aucune victoire n'est possible.*²¹⁹

²¹⁶ *L'Humanité*, 8 février 1934, p.1.

²¹⁷ Police sources revealed that 1,214 arrests were made on 9 February, compared to 668 on the 6th.

²¹⁸ *L'Humanité*, 10 février 1934, p.1.

²¹⁹ France Inter, *2000 Ans d'Histoire*, broadcast on 1 June 2006.

In his memoirs, Blum described 12 February as the day that saved the Republic.²²⁰ The demonstration proved a remarkable success in numbers and in the political message it delivered. Party propaganda, ideologies and political strategies were all forgotten for one day and, according to Blum, *‘l’instinct populaire, la volonté populaire avaient imposé l’unité d’action des travailleurs pour la défense de la République.’*²²¹ This, it seems, was fair comment: unity came from the rank and file of the left, which decided it was essential to halt the rise of fascism. But those were very early days and it was to be a long and arduous path for all parties involved until the unification in the Popular Front and the national electoral victory of May 1936.

In February 1935, Blum claimed that the great bipartisan gatherings of 12 February in Paris had their counterpart in every city in France.

*L’élan ne s’est pas arrêté aux grandes agglomérations urbaines; il a gagné les petites cités tranquilles de la province, les villages de la campagne. La grande lame sortie du fond des volontés populaires s’est étalée en un instant sur toute la France.*²²²

Julian Jackson broadly agrees, writing ‘the impact of 6 February was not restricted to Paris alone.’²²³ And Serge Wolikow goes further by stating that *‘Pour la première fois se produit, dans le même moment, un mouvement étendu au pays tout entier avec des défilés le plus souvent unitaires.’*²²⁴ Events in the Moselle, however, took a different turn to those which occurred in Paris and elsewhere.

In a letter to the Minister of the Interior on the 7th, the *préfet* of the Moselle reported that *‘le calme complet règne dans mon département où aucun incident n’a été signalé.’*²²⁵ In Metz, the streets attracted more bystanders who had read

²²⁰ Blum, *L’Œuvre, 1934-1937*, p.17.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Blum, *Le Populaire*, 10 February 1935, p.1.

²²³ Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, p.30.

²²⁴ Serge Wolikow, *op.cit.*, p.67. For an examination of the number of strikes and demonstrations in French *départements* on 12 February, see Antoine Prost, *Autour du Front Populaire: aspects du mouvement social au XXe siècle*, Paris: Seuil, 2006. See also the collection of articles gathered in Jean-Charles Asselain et al., *La France en Mouvement, 1934-1938*, Seyssel: Champ-Vallon, 1986 and Danielle Tartakowsky, *Les Manifestations de rue en France 1918-1968*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1997.

²²⁵ AN, Lettre du préfet au ministre de l’Intérieur, 7 février 1934, F7/13308.

the local press and had expectantly gone out in the hope of seeing something happen. In order to prevent violent demonstrations in his *département*, the *préfet* ordered a state of emergency, which proscribed gatherings of more than twenty people. As a result, the *ligues*, which had planned to protest in support of the dead and injured of the 6th in Place de l'Hôtel de Ville in Metz on the 9th, cancelled their demonstration at the last minute.²²⁶ Because of the *ligues'* decision, the Communists, the CGT and the CGTU, who had organised a counter-demonstration on the same day, also abandoned their plan. Between 6 and 12 February, therefore all was quiet in the Moselle.

On the 12th, all the major political organisations of the Mosellan left called upon their forces to protest against the 'fascist coup'. At a meeting organised by the Communist party in Metz in the evening of the 9th, leaders of the CGT, CGTU, League of Human Rights, and SFIO called for the formation of a *front unique* and agreed to stop work on the 12th.²²⁷ At the end of the meeting, after condemning the Doumergue government and the *ligues* and singing the International in German, all parties agreed on the following resolution, '*Les ouvriers réunis le vendredi 9 février ... acclament la lutte antifasciste ... acclament la grève générale pour lundi prochain pour l'émancipation de la classe ouvrière.*'²²⁸ In Metz, the strike was general at the Manufacture des Tabacs and partial among primary school teachers and at the railworks.²²⁹ In the north-east of the *département*, where workers did not normally work on Mondays but were forced to do so by management, 6,000 people peacefully demonstrated in the streets of Thionville.²³⁰ In the industrial town of Amnéville the Communist mayor failed to stop workers entering the factories. In the mining sectors of Forbach, Boulay, Saint-Avold and

²²⁶ The *ligues* in question were the Solidarité Française, the Jeunesses Patriotes and the Action Française. AN, Lettre du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, 10 février 1934, F7/13308.

²²⁷ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire de police des 4^e et 5^e arrondissements de Metz, 9 février 1934, 98AL695.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ ADBR, Rapport de Paul Valot au ministre de la Justice, Paris, 12 février 1934, 98AL695.

²³⁰ The management of de Wendel factories had ordered the workers to take Saturday off in order to force them to work on Monday 12th; in Chambre des Députés, *Rapport général ... du 6 février 1934*, Tome 4, No 3393, p.56.

Sarreguemines, the *commissaires spéciaux* reported that '*le mouvement de grève n'a pas été suivi par les diverses organisations syndicales.*'²³¹

It is difficult to give an accurate number of strikers as sources contradict each other. Those from the CGT affirm that over 6,500 factory workers went on strike, 3,000 in the Metz area and 2,000 in the de Wendel fiefdom of Hayange.²³² In contrast, the *Préfecture* gave a total of 2,000 strikers for the whole *département*, less than one third as many. But like in Paris, all demonstrators called for unity, as reported in the local left-wing press. *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine* described the '*fraternisation des ouvriers CGT et CGTU contre le fascisme*',²³³ the Socialist monthly *La Bataille* affirmed '*la volonté d'unité des prolétaires s'est manifesté au grand jour*',²³⁴ and Léon Jouhaux, leader of the CGT, was quoted in *Le Travailleur de la Moselle* saying, '*une classe se dresse presque'unanime. L'avenir nous appartient!*'²³⁵

Thus, while the major organisations of the Mosellan left promptly and unilaterally reacted to the events of the 6th, the results were mixed. While the Francophone industrial cantons between Metz and West-Thionville responded to the calls of the left, the predominantly German-speaking mining cantons of southern Moselle remained quiet and did not take part in the strikes or the demonstrations. But in a *département* where, according to a police report, '*les camarades montrent peu d'intérêt dans les affaires politiques*' and where political activism was quasi-inexistent, 12 February may nonetheless be interpreted as a relative success for the left.²³⁶ It was the first display of organised labour movement since the ill-fated strikes of 1919-1920 and it appeared that party leaders, like the base, genuinely wished unity. But, as shall be demonstrated, the path to unity was to be a very difficult one for the Mosellan left. This was partly due

²³¹ ADBR, Rapport des commissaires spéciaux de Forbach, Boulay, Saint-Avold and Sarreguemines, 12 février 1934, 98AL695.

²³² Chambre des Députés, *Rapport général ... du 6 février 1934*, Tome 4, No 3393, p.55.

²³³ 'Demonstration der Eisen-bahner von Montigny', *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine*, 13 Februar 1934, p.1.

²³⁴ Amédée Dunois, 'La Journée du 12', *La Bataille*, mars 1934, p.1.

²³⁵ Léon Jouhaux, 'Le Caractère de la Journée du 12 février', *Le Travailleur de la Moselle*, mars 1934, p.1.

²³⁶ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Gare Centrale Metz, 25 juin 1934, 24Z16.

to the predominant role of the right in the *département* and partly to the left's struggle, despite the 12th, to find its place in an area so loyal to a clergy essentially anti-Communist. In order to establish the role of each political organisation in the making of the Popular Front, the next section will begin with a study of the parties of the left followed by those of the right.

Part Two: The Left

The PCF

In January 1934, the PCF's Central Committee declared,

*notre tactique de front unique est une tactique d'action. Nous ne cherchons pas l'accord impossible avec les chefs et organisations socialistes. Nous voulons combattre côte à côte avec les travailleurs socialistes contre l'ennemi commun: la bourgeoisie.*²³⁷

Some years later, Thorez claimed that '*dès le debut de 1934, nous soulignons l'absolue nécessité d'un vaste front unique qui engloberait républicains, démocrates, libéraux, socialistes et communistes.*'²³⁸ But as late as 15 June 1934 the leader of the PCF wrote of the SFIO leadership, '*ces gens-là restent les adversaires de l'unité d'action et de l'unité tout court*', thus implying that the class against class strategy still prevailed and that the Socialist leaders remained the party's prime political enemies,²³⁹ until the last week of June, when the party abruptly changed tactics known as the *Grand Tournant* and advocated joint action with the Socialists.²⁴⁰ On 27 July the SFIO and the PCF signed the pact of unity. The pact explained the motives for unity as follows,

²³⁷ Thorez, 'Pour un Nouveau Pas en Avant', *Les Cahiers du Bolchévisme*, 2, 15 janvier 1934, pp.79-80.

²³⁸ Thorez, *Fils du Peuple*, Paris: Editions Sociales, 1949, pp.83-84.

²³⁹ Thorez, 'A la Veille de la Conférence du Parti: Pour l'Organisation du Front Unique de Lutte Antifasciste', *Les Cahiers du Bolchévisme*, 12, 15 juin 1934, p.711.

²⁴⁰ Ignoring the Central Committee's orders, Jacques Doriot, the Communist deputy-mayor of Saint-Denis and an official of the Comintern, had made repetitive calls for the unity of the left against fascism prior June 1934. Soon after 6 and 12 February, he wrote an open letter to the Communist International, entitled 'L'Unité d'Action' and created his own ant-fascist committee in Saint-Denis with the support of local Socialist and CGT activists. The PCF's response was swift and clear: '*Le Bureau Politique exige la cessation immédiate de la lutte menée par le camarade Doriot contre les*

*Le comité central du Parti communiste et la commission administrative permanente du Parti socialiste sont animés de la volonté de battre le fascisme. Il est clair que ce but ne peut être atteint que par l'action commune des masses... L'intérêt de la classe ouvrière exige donc que le Parti socialiste et le Parti communiste organisent cette action commune contre le fascisme.*²⁴¹

What motivated the PCF to abandon its sectarian position and unite with its arch-enemy? Donald Sassoon, writing of the Comintern, posits several reasons for its contemporary change of policy: 'the lessons drawn from the Nazi accession to power; the USSR's fear of being isolated and facing a hostile capitalist world; pressures from other Western communist parties; the obvious dead-end into which the 'Third Period' [class against class] policies had led' thus suggesting that Soviet foreign policy was the main reason behind Stalin and the Comintern's change of tactics.²⁴² This combined with what Sassoon calls France's 'special national conditions' (the struggle against fascism) led to the PCF adopting a national patriotic line and permitted, as he puts it, 'the development of an antifascist popular front strategy aimed at renewing the links between Communists and Socialists'.²⁴³

After securing the collaboration of the Socialists, '*la course pour la conquête des classes moyennes*', as Thorez called it, began.²⁴⁴ On 21 September 1934, at the Salle Bullier in Paris, Thorez used the terms Popular Front for the first time, urging the unification of all the forces of the left in a '*front populaire pour le pain, la liberté et la paix*'.²⁴⁵ As the party of the middle-classes, the Radicals strongly opposed the PCF's positions on private property and capital, and initially any agreement between the two parties seemed impossible. But the Communists, having set aside their class against class tactics, were determined to build the widest political coalition. Accordingly, as a police report put it, they toned down '*au*

décisions du Comité Central et lui demande de lutter avec l'ensemble du parti contre l'ennemi de classe et son soutien social-fasciste'. ADSSD, Lettre du Bureau Politique aux membres du Comité Central, 8 mars 1934, 3Mi6/110 séquence 716.

²⁴¹ AN, Blum papers, extrait de *Le Populaire*, 'Le Pacte d'Unité d'Action', 28 juillet 1934, 570AP12.

²⁴² Donald Sassoon, *op.cit.*, p.39.

²⁴³ *Ibid*, p.35.

²⁴⁴ Thorez, *Fils du Peuple*, p.86.

²⁴⁵ Thorez, *Fils du Peuple*, p.87. The meeting gathered both Socialists and Communists.

maximum la rudesse de leur doctrine afin de ne pas heurter les éléments modérés'.²⁴⁶ By the summer of 1935, their efforts proved successful. On 14 July 1935 the committee of the Popular Front gathered forty antifascist organisations on Place de la Bastille in Paris, and before hundreds of thousands of supporters PCF, SFIO and Radicals leaders declared in unison:

*Nous représentants mandatés du rassemblement populaire du 14 juillet ... faisons serment solennel de rester unis pour désarmer, dissoudre les ligues fascistes, de défendre et développer les libertés démocratiques, d'assurer la paix humaine.*²⁴⁷

The final stage in the formation of the Popular Front came in January 1936 when the Popular Front's national committee obtained the official support of the Radical party. Thereupon the three parties signed a common electoral programme comprising broad political and economic demands.

On 15 January 1934, the Communist party Central Committee reminded regional sections of the unchanged official line: '*notre Comité Central a fait corriger les erreurs des organisations régionales et locales du parti et a condamné la cessation de la tactique classe contre classe*'.²⁴⁸ The reminder strongly suggests that at least some local activists, even before the Stavisky riots, had set aside the party's line in favour of joint action. This appears to have been the case for the Mosellan section. In mid-January 1934, in reaction to the increased activities of Neue Front (known as Force Nouvelle in French), a *ligue* linked to the Solidarité Française, Edouard Meyer, leader of the Communist section of Sarreguemines, constituted an antifascist front known as Antifabund or ANTIFA. The group included Radicals, Socialists, Communists and members of the League of Human Rights. The concept of joint action was so successful that a meeting organised by Meyer on 1 February 1934 in Sarreguemines attracted over 1,500 supporters.

²⁴⁶ AN, 'Rapport sur l'organisation de la manifestation du 14 juillet 1935', 3 juillet 1935, F7/13305.

²⁴⁷ AN, Texte du serment solennel, 14 July 1935, F7/13305.

²⁴⁸ Thorez, 'Pour un Nouveau Pas en Avant', *Cahiers du Bolchévisme*, 2, 15 janvier 1934, pp.79-80.

Other meetings were organised and every time, the police reported, '*ce sont les communistes qui se sont trouvés en majorité.*'²⁴⁹

The threat to democracy and the Republic evidently looked as real to the Mosellan left as it did in Paris in the aftermath of the Stavisky riots, and the wind of panic that swept through the left rank and file in the capital hit the Moselle with a similar force. On 16 February 1934 the Communist mayors of Basse-Yutz, Amnéville and Rombas, in a joint meeting with Socialists and Radicals, called for action against the reunion of Francistes planned in Thionville for 25 February.²⁵⁰ Although it was a Radical lawyer, Maître Breistroff, who convened the meeting, the Communists monopolised the discussions and pressed for the creation of an action committee as soon as possible. On 8 April, in reaction to another Franciste reunion, a fascist *ligue* explored later in this chapter, thousands of Communist antifascists gathered in Thionville. In the evening, after the Communists were accused of trying to break into the *commissariat de police*, violent clashes erupted between the police and the demonstrators. According to a PCF internal report, these events, which saw the police arrest 165 demonstrators including Fritsch, the mayor of Basse-Yutz, Friedrich, editor of *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine*, Barbian, the mayor of Rombas, and Schwob, leader of the CGTU-steelworks,²⁵¹ '*marquent l'activation du mouvement antifasciste de la Moselle.*'²⁵² In late April, despite localised attempts to fight the fascist threat, the Mosellan Communists endorsed the party's decision to dismiss Doriot and reiterated their support to the Central Committee and the partisan class against class tactics. As they agreed in a resolution:

après avoir discuté la plateforme contre-révolutionnaire du groupe Rolland-Barbé-Doriot sur la question du Front Unique, le groupe décide à l'unanimité, tous les camarades étant présents, d'affirmer

²⁴⁹ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au directeur de la sûreté générale, Sarreguemines, 1er mars 1934, F7/13038.

²⁵⁰ ADM, Rapport du commissariat de police de Thionville au sous-préfet, 17 février 1934, 24Z15.

²⁵¹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 9 avril 1934, 98AL683.

²⁵² ADSSD, 'Informations sur la situation en Alsace-Lorraine', 18 mai 1934, 3Mi6/108 séquence 706.

*son attachement indéfectible à l'Internationale Communiste et au Comité Central du PC.*²⁵³

Despite those obvious early signs of joint action against fascism, it was only after the *Grand Tournant* that the idea of a united front really gained momentum among Mosellan Communists as well. The local cells initiated the creation of antifascist committees in several towns: Sarreguemines, Sarrebourg, Metz, Thionville, Basse-Yutz, Hagondange, Rombas, Hayange.²⁵⁴ Some of the ANTIFA committees secured the alliance only of Communist-backed organisations, such as the CGTU, the ARAC, the Jeunesses Communistes, while others, such as in Metz, secured the alliance of the Communists, the CGTU, the SFIO and the League of Human Rights.²⁵⁵ But difficulties immediately arose. The Socialist section in Metz could not forget the Communists' attacks that took place since 1928 and it found the idea of an alliance between the two parties very difficult. Days after the signature of the pact of unity, the *préfet* reported that the Socialist section of Metz had refused the Communists' invitation to a joint meeting.²⁵⁶

At the end of 1934, Socialists in the Moselle still refused to join the *front unique* which the Communists promoted. A police report from Metz in December 1934 described the antifascist front at the end of 1934:

*le nombre des adhérents au Front Commun Antifasciste ... est certainement considérable, 3,000 a 4,000 pour le département. Cependant les partisans du front commun ... sont en désaccord fréquent.... C'est le parti communiste qui, en fait, a toujours dirigé l'action menée par l'ANTIFA.*²⁵⁷

The idea that the Communists were trying to rob the SFIO of its supporters had been a constant theme in the turbulent relationship of the two parties since the scission of 1920. Had the PCF's strategy really changed? It is true that the Communists stopped their sectarian attacks on the Socialists, but the PCF's

²⁵³ ADSSD, 'Résolution du parti communiste d'Alsace-Lorraine', 24 avril 34, 3Mi6/108, séquence 704.

²⁵⁴ ADSSD, 'Informations sur la situation en Alsace-Lorraine' 18 mai 1934, 3Mi6/108 séquence 706.

²⁵⁵ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz, 12 mars 1934, 301M56.

²⁵⁶ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, 7 août 1934, 98AL683.

²⁵⁷ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 29 décembre 1934, 98AL683.

unavowed aim was to control the coalition in order to consolidate its position as leader. In a meeting in Metz, one of the leaders of the Mosellan section declared '*il faut que le front unique se réalise, il faut travailler de toutes ses forces à sa création, mais au sein du Parti Communiste.*'²⁵⁸ Throughout 1935 difficulties between the two parties remained and were further exacerbated by one particular point of contention which shaped Mosellan politics since the mid-1920s: Autonomism.

Arguing that the workers of Alsace-Lorraine should have the right to decide their own future, the Communists had advocated independence for Alsace-Lorraine since 1925. One might assume that because of its new strategy of uniting with the Socialists and the Radical-Socialists the PCF might have altered its position towards Autonomism, a concept which went against the Republican principles of unity and indivisibility. Remarkably, however, this was not the case. During the early months of the Popular Front, when Thorez was trying to change the image of the party from that of anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois to that of protector of Republican values, the PCF still supported the cause of independence in the Moselle. Before June 1934 and its change of strategy, the party leader regularly described the status of Alsace-Lorraine as a region at '*un rang moral plus bas que celui de la dernière colonie française.*'²⁵⁹ But even after the party adopted the path of the Popular Front, Thorez declared that the principle of self-determination of the people of Alsace-Lorraine should be added to the party candidates' manifestos at the next elections. Why did Thorez engage on this line?

By putting the issue of *la question nationale* on an equal footing with that of antifascism, the PCF was hoping to lead the working-class masses away from right-wing parties such as the Union Républicaine Lorraine, whose policies and political programme epitomised the region's identity and *particularisme*. Communist cadres from the regional federation of Alsace-Lorraine who gathered in Strasbourg in June 1935 wholly backed Thorez. They encouraged party

²⁵⁸ ADM, Rapport du commissaire Gare Centrale Metz au préfet, Metz, 8 décembre 1934, 24Z16.

²⁵⁹ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Thionville, 13 avril 1934, 98AL683.

members and supporters to create *Volksfront* committees in which Socialist, Christian and dissident Communist workers should unite in order to intensify 'la nouvelle lutte pour la libération de notre peuple', as *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine* put it.²⁶⁰ Evidently the PCF in Alsace and the Moselle sought to exploit any possible source of influence including appeals to the separatist vote in order to turn the working classes away from the Union Républicaine Lorraine. This no doubt reflected the PCF's wish to build as wide a coalition as possible, but it was also a dangerous and divisive policy. For one thing, it enabled right wingers to penetrate the *Volksfront* committees. For another it threatened to split the regional section, with head office in Strasbourg in favour of self-rule and Francophile cadres in the Moselle wholly opposed.

Since 1921, the Communist section of the Moselle was part of the regional federation of Alsace-Lorraine. Its headquarters were located in Strasbourg and the offices of its official bilingual newspaper, *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine*, were in Metz. The region, as described by Moscow, was of prime importance because of its large-scale industry and the political potential of its large working-class population.²⁶¹ In an open letter, the Central Committee shared this view:

*L'Est de la France n'est pas une situation quelconque mais une des régions décisives ... par suite du rôle de l'industrie lourde de cette région dans l'économie du capitalisme français, de l'importance numérique de son prolétariat, de son importance stratégique et militaire.*²⁶²

In 1936 the Moselle produced no less than 42 per cent of France's iron ore, making this border *département* not only crucial to France's economy but also to its military and strategic decisions.²⁶³ But for a region so important in the eyes of

²⁶⁰ *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine*, 18 juin 1935, p.1.

²⁶¹ ADSSD, 'Rapport de Moscou', 8 octobre 1934, 3Mi6/108 séquence 704.

²⁶² ADSSD, 'Lettre ouverte du Comité central', 9 novembre 1935, 3Mi6/117 séquence 741.

²⁶³ Statistique Générale de France, *Annuaire Statistique*, 1936, p.114. The neighbouring Meurthe-et-Moselle accounted for 52 percent of the total national production. Together the two *départements* produced an astonishing 94 percent of France's iron ore. Interestingly enough, the most efficient fortifications of the Maginot Line were built in the vicinity of the Thionville and Hagondange areas where the steelwork factories were concentrated.

Moscow, why were the number of activists still desperately low after February 1934? And was the party doing anything to reverse this situation?

In December 1934, the *préfet* reported 1,040 communist activists, with over a third (395) in the coal-mining areas of Forbach and Sarreguemines.²⁶⁴ This figure of 1,040 actually decreased until January 1936 when it reached a low 512.²⁶⁵ The *préfet* explained the decline by citing the internal crises that shook the Mosellan section in the first years of the Popular Front. As explained in the previous chapter, a series of factors had made it almost impossible for the Communists and the left to establish themselves in this highly-industrialised part of France, but one might have expected that after the political storm of 6 and 12 February 1934 the active propaganda of the Communist Party to form antifascist fronts would meet some success. Could the party be held responsible for what an internal party report described as ‘*effectifs squelettiques*’?²⁶⁶ And were party leaders really focusing on the new task on drawing all the progressive forces into a united front against fascism?

The Central Committee was well aware of the problematic situation in the Moselle. As well as the operational and financial difficulties in translating every document from French into German, the party explained the problems facing the regional federation in 1935 thus:

Le niveau idéologique des membres de la région d'Alsace-Lorraine est en général assez bas pour les raisons suivantes : la région a été jusqu'à 1930 complètement coupée de la vie de l'ensemble du parti. La question de la langue et l'impossibilité de lire la littérature française et de suivre la vie du parti français ont empêché le développement du niveau idéologique. Il s'y ajoute encore la faiblesse de la direction régionale, ses mauvaises méthodes de

²⁶⁴ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, 29 décembre 1934, 98AL683. This figure accounts only to those who regularly paid a monthly subscription. The number of sympathisers and readers of *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine* took the figure much higher, around 8,000.

²⁶⁵ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz au préfet, 14 janvier 1936, 301M78.

²⁶⁶ The expression ‘*effectifs squelettiques*’ referred to the number of trade-unionists in Eastern France and was used in a report by the National Federation of Railway Workers of France, the Colonies and the Protectorates in 1933. ADSSD, Rapport au Secrétaire-général du Parti Communiste, 19 janvier 1933, 3Mi6/97 séquence 643.

*travail qui ne lui ont pas permis de faire un meilleur travail d'éducation au parti.*²⁶⁷

Mohn, the secretary-general of the regional union of the CGTU, offered a similar explanation: *'les camarades sont venus trop tard. Ils ne comprennent rien à l'Alsace-Lorraine.... Le PC régional est en crise ... ce qui crée une situation pénible.'*²⁶⁸ Indeed, in 1934 and 1935 the regional section encountered crises that threatened the very existence of the party itself, let alone that of the left-wing coalition.

The Central Committee correctly identified language as one of the primary challenges the party faced in the Moselle. But the PCF's financial difficulties played an equally important part. The low number of activists and the similarly low circulation of *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine* simply did not provide the necessary revenue the party needed for an active and effective propaganda. A police report in December 1934 blamed the party's financial difficulties on the economic crisis and the number of unemployed. Although Alsace-Lorraine ceased to exist as a separate political entity after the Treaty of Versailles, many political organisations, such as the Communist Party and the CGTU maintained organisational structures defined by the old German border. And despite the Mosellans' apparent rejection of Strasbourg's supremacy, the Communist party decided to centralise its services and moved the party's newspaper from Metz to Strasbourg in April 1935. This left the Moselle even more dependent on decisions taken in Alsace, and created tensions between the Alsatian headquarters and members in the Moselle. It is not clear whether this move alleviated the party's financial crisis, but three months later, in line with the party's national strategy of decentralisation, the Moselle separated from Alsace and created its own federation. These events are crucial in understanding the making of the Popular Front in the *département* since while the PCF was fervently working for unity in the rest of the country, the Mosellan Communists went through a series of crises.

²⁶⁷ ADSSD, 'L'Organisation du Parti dans la région d' Alsace-Lorraine', n.d. but thought to be written around May - June 1935, 3Mi6/116 séquence 740.

²⁶⁸ ADSSD, 'Rapport sur l'organisation du Parti Communiste d'Alsace-Lorraine au Politburo', F. Billoux, 6 septembre 1933, 3Mi6/97 séquence 636.

Another event which damaged the Moselle section of the party in 1934-1935 was the arrest and conviction of two of its central figures, Fritsch, the mayor of Basse-Yutz and the editor of *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine*, and Friedrich, a key figure of the Mosellan section in the interwar period. As a *commissaire spécial* from Metz reported, they were tried and found guilty '*pour l'espionnage à la suite de divulgations, par la voie de leur journal, de faits intéressants la défense nationale*'.²⁶⁹ They were fined 500 francs each and sent to prison for three months. Fritsch was a key figure in the running of the Moselle section as his offices in Metz operated as a secondary head office for the region and provided the missing link between Strasbourg and the Mosellan cells. Paris, however, seemed to think otherwise as it refused to provide the bail necessary for his release from prison. It was the Basse-Yutz section which, through collections, succeeded in gathering the necessary funds to release him.²⁷⁰ In December, French courts arrested another prominent leader of the party: Georges Kraus, one of the leaders of the Montigny-lès-Metz section, which had provided a large number of demonstrators and strikers on 12 February. He was arrested for forgery and sent to prison for three months. The party were not prepared to provide his bail and instead they swiftly substituted him for a new leader once the court had passed the sentence.²⁷¹ Even though Fritsch and Friedrich argued in their defence that the information they published came from an article in a right-wing local newspaper, their arrest reflected the difficulties of the Communists in operating in the Moselle.

These events proved a serious blow to the Mosellan section. They also give an invaluable indication as to the section's state of affairs during the first years of the Popular Front. Moreover, it had to battle against ex-Communists Béron and Doeblé's attempts to create their own *front unique*. Béron first won his seat of deputy for West-Thionville under the Communist banner in 1928. Despite his

²⁶⁹ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz au préfet, 1^{er} mars 1934, 24Z16. The articles in question provided information on the design of the fortifications of the Maginot Line such as the thickness of the walls. Two other leaders were tried and received the same sentence: Durmeyer from the Hagondange cell and Hemmerling from Montigny-lès-Metz.

²⁷⁰ ADSSD, 'Lettre de Noll au Parti Communiste', 15 octobre 1934, 3Mi6/108 séquence 706.

²⁷¹ The new leader was Charles Danger.

exclusion from the party in April 1932, he ran as an Independent Socialist and kept his seat at the legislative elections that took place one month later. Doebélé first won his seat as a Communist in Forbach in 1928, and after he was dismissed from the party in April 1932 he was also re-elected as an Independent Socialist in 1932. As reported in a party report, it appears that both deputies fell in disgrace with the party's central offices as early as February 1932.²⁷² The PCF subsequently treated them as renegades and enemies of the party, and despite Béron's efforts to reintegrate the party after his victory in May 1932, the Politburo ignored him.

When the PCF embarked upon the path of unity in 1934, it made it clear the two renegades were not to be included, and in a situation reminiscent to that of Doriot in Saint-Denis both deputies sought to create their own *front unique* in 1935. They began by publishing their own newspapers (Doebélé, *Le Réveil* and Béron, *L'action économique et politique*), which later merged into one, and Béron, the incontestable leader of this other common front, organised a series of meetings, mainly in his fiefdom of Hayange, to demonstrate that the fight against fascism could be organised outside the PCF's influence. It is not clear how many supporters Béron attracted or what impact he had on the Mosellan Popular Front, but as the latter caught momentum, it became impossible for the PCF to ignore Béron and the thousands of loyal activists who supported him, and in late 1935, it welcomed him and Doebélé onto the coalition's *départemental* board.²⁷³ The local Communist cadres, however, remained suspicious of their ex-comrades, and despite their official directives which stipulated '*aucune exclusive sur quiconque veut se joindre au Front populaire*',²⁷⁴ Eugène Anstett, the Moselle's secretary-general the CGTU-Moselle, declared at a private party meeting in early 1936, '*ils doivent être éliminés de la direction du Front populaire parce que renégats, et par conséquent, ennemis du Parti Communiste.*'²⁷⁵

²⁷² ADSSD, 'Matériaux sur la situation en Alsace-Lorraine', nd, 3Mi6/81 séquence 549.

²⁷³ According to an internal party report, it is estimated that approximately 10,000 Communist votes were lost to Béron and Doebélé in 1932, and those voters may have remained loyal supporters to the two outcasts in 1934.²⁷³ ADSSD, 'Rapport sur les élections législatives de 1932 en Alsace-Lorraine', 10 septembre 1932, 3Mi6/81 séquence 549.

²⁷⁴ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Thionville au sous-préfet, 30 octobre 1935, 301M78.

²⁷⁵ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 15 janvier 1936, 301M78.

The Communist party was by far the most successful left-wing political force in interwar Moselle, and as such controlled and led the Popular Front coalition. But the crises it faced seem to have diverted most of its energies and instead of working on the *front unique*, the party focused its resources and efforts on internal battles, reorganisation and normalisation exercises, which materialised in the move of its newspaper and the creation of the *Section Française de l'Internationale Communiste de la Moselle* on 7 July 1935. But even after the creation of the *départementale* federation, the party still seemed disorganised. On 14 July, one week after the creation of the Popular Front, Communists, Radicals and Socialists sang the Marseillaise in unison at the Paris gathering which cemented the coalition. No such event took place in the Moselle. According to one press report,

*la journée du 14 juillet s'est passée à Metz et dans le département ... sans aucun incident. Il n'y a eu aucune manifestation.... Il n'y a pas eu de cortège.... En résumé la journée fut absolument calme ... dans tout le département.*²⁷⁶

The SFIO

Following the February 1934 events, the SFIO faced an internal crisis that tested the party's leadership and unity. Indeed, the tension 6 February caused in the Socialist camp only exacerbated previous disagreements and affinities within the party. Firstly, there was the rank and file who demonstrated their enthusiasm for joint action against fascism on 12 February. Secondly, to the left of the party, a faction led by the Parisian SFIO federations advocated reunification with the Communist party. Its leaders were Marceau Pivert and Jean Zyromski from the Seine, and Emile Farinet from the Seine-et-Oise. All three had in fact invited the Communists to a joint demonstration on 8 February, but the Communists rejected the invitation and instead held their own demonstration on 9 February at République. Thirdly, a group led by Ludovic Oscar Frossard and Marx Dormoy rejected the idea of unity of action with the Communists on the basis that the PCF

²⁷⁶ AN, note de l'agence de presse Custos, Metz, 14 juillet 1935, F7/13305.

simply could not be trusted. The fourth group, comprising the moderate wing of the party, including Paul Faure and Blum, most of the deputies and the CAP, believed that by supporting Daladier's government, rejecting Doumergue's and remaining faithful to the Socialist dogma, they were fulfilling the party's mission. But the fall of Daladier and the subsequent formation of a right-wing government compromised the SFIO leaders, and at the national council meeting held in Pré-Saint-Germain on 11 March 1934 a majority of members (3,752 against 75) agreed that the political upheaval that ensued from the February events required a rethink of the party's strategy. At the same meeting, Blum declared: '*La ligne directrice de nos résolutions doit être inspirée des événements de février. Instinctivement la classe ouvrière s'unit pour se défendre. Nous voulons l'unité.*'²⁷⁷

Conscious however that the Communists' strategy had remained unchanged and that, '*le bureau politique du parti communiste continuera à opposer les chefs aux militants, à essayer de briser les cadres de notre parti*', Blum claimed that '*la lutte contre le fascisme ne peut être conduite que sous l'action socialiste*'.²⁷⁸ At the end of the meeting they decided to set up an interim commission that would present '*un plan de rassemblement de tous les éléments prolétariens ... en vue de l'unité d'action*' at the next party conference.²⁷⁹ At the thirty-first party conference held in Toulouse between 20 and 23 May, little progress was made as internal dissensions and divergence of views within the party eclipsed the debates on antifascism and unity. By and large party members still agreed that 6 February had made the fight against fascism a priority as stated in the final motion:

*Depuis l'émeute fasciste du 6 février ... le Parti doit se considérer en état de mobilisation permanente. Toute activité du parti doit se concentrer publiquement vers ce double objet: Préserver contre les agressions fascistes sa propre existence. Organiser la défense de tout ce que le fascisme menace.*²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ AN, Blum papers, 'Résumé du discours de Léon Blum au Conseil National de Pré-Saint-Germain le 11 mars 1934', 12 mars 1934, 570AP12.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ AN, Blum papers, 'La Motion de Toulouse', 23 May 1934, 570AP12.

Fearing another split of the party when a number of activists left to found the Parti Socialiste de France (néo-socialistes), the SFIO leaders compromised on a final motion that put the three following principles at the same level: the conquest of power, the economic crisis and the fight against fascism. *The Times* correspondent wrote that the conference showed 'a complete lack of unity' and that 'the authority of the leaders was being questioned in consequence of the sterility of the policy pursued by them.'²⁸¹ As for the Radical *L'Oeuvre*, its front page described the Toulouse motion '*un vide stupéfiant*'.²⁸² One month after the conference, the Communists directed their new campaign of '*unité à tout prix*' towards the Socialist party, and on 16 July 1935, *Le Populaire*'s headline read, '*Le Conseil National du 15 Juillet 1934 accepte l'unité d'action*'.²⁸³

In public, Blum celebrated the alliance of the two parties, but he was well aware of the difficult relations between his party and the PCF.²⁸⁴ This became very apparent on the subject of a common manifesto. On 24 November 1934, in a letter sent to the SFIO by the Politburo, the PCF asked for '*l'établissement d'un programme d'action revendicative commun à nos deux partis.... [Ce] programme d'action pouvant servir de base à la formation d'un front populaire du travail, de la paix et de la liberté*'.²⁸⁵ The manifesto as presented by the PCF offered a broad list of demands aimed at the proletariat and the middle classes - '*les ouvriers, les petits commerçants, les artisans [et] les fonctionnaires*'- such as '*la semaine des quarante heures*', '*l'institution de la propriété commerciale intégrale*', '*la dissolution des ligues fascistes*' and '*la dissolution de la Chambre et de nouvelles élections immédiates*'. Despite the SFIO's initial refusal to accept the programme proposed by the Communists, the two parties published the Popular Front's electoral

²⁸¹ 'Aims of French Socialism, Party Disunion', *The Times*, 24 May 1934, p.12.

²⁸² 'Le Rassemblement Nécessaire', *L'Oeuvre*, 28 May 1934, p.1.

²⁸³ AN, Blum Papers, Copie d'un article publié dans *Le Populaire* le 16 juillet 1934, p.1, 570AP12.

²⁸⁴ At a joint PCF-SFIO meeting at the Salle Bullier in Paris on 20 September 1934, Thorez celebrated the unity of the two proletarian parties and called for the *unité organique* claiming, '*des divergences subsistent sur la constitution de nos partis.... Mais la volonté populaire d'unité peut surmonter cela. Nous devons aller de l'unité d'action à l'unité organique.*' AN, Blum papers, copie d'un article de Blum dans *Le Populaire*, 21 septembre 1934, 570AP12.

²⁸⁵ AN, Blum papers, 'Lettre du Bureau Politique du Parti communiste', 24 novembre 1934, 570AP12.

programme on 11 January 1936. In the end, it was the Socialists who were forced to back down on some their more extreme demands as the Communists were eager not to scare the middle classes with anti-capitalist and nationalisation declarations. Four months after the publication of the common manifesto, the Popular Front coalition won the legislative elections, which gave the SFIO and the Third Republic its first ever Socialist *président du Conseil*.

It is quite clear that throughout this period, the SFIO struggled to contain dissent within its ranks. But under pressure from its base, the party half-heartedly entered the coalition in July 1934, which by then the PCF was actively pursuing. It is however not true to argue that the Socialist hesitations hindered the progress of the antifascist coalition and that the party merely followed the PCF. While the Communists were still calling the SFIO *sociaux-fascistes* and *assassins*, Socialist activists were already debating the idea of a common front as favoured by the Zyromski and Pivert camp. Probably because the party structure and leadership was so different from that of the PCF – the party did not receive orders from a foreign director - the Socialists had to have debates and battles before coming to an agreement. The SFIO's refusal to compromise on a common manifesto with the PCF for over a year should also be interpreted as a sign of the party's refusal to follow the Communists' lead. They only agreed on the common programme once the Radicals had made it clear that they would join the Popular Front as the third force, thus balancing the power of the PCF in the coalition.

In his speech at Pré-Saint-Germain in March 1934, Blum had urged the federations to lead the movements of unity with the Communists:

*Il faut dire aux fédérations et aux sections: Vous devez favoriser le courant unitaire et même en prendre l'initiative, sans pour cela tomber dans les pièges qui vous seront tendus. Sur le plan national on ne peut rien espérer actuellement. Sur le plan international, Moscou renverrait sans doute au plan national.*²⁸⁶

And again in May 1934, at the thirty-first party conference, the SFIO reiterated the same message: '*[Le parti] compte sur ses fédérations pour exalter et discipliner*

²⁸⁶ AN, Blum papers, 'Résumé du discours de Léon Blum au Conseil National de Pré-Saint-Germain le 11 mars 1934', *Le Populaire*, 12 mars 1934, 570AP12.

*l'énergie militante des travailleurs en leur fixant ce mot d'ordre: «Lutte sans merci contre le fascisme».*²⁸⁷ It was therefore at the local level that the Socialist party sought, at least at first, to promote joint action with the PCF.

Notwithstanding the lack of sources pertaining to the Mosellan federation of the Socialist party, it has nonetheless been possible to assess the role it played in the formation of the Popular Front.²⁸⁸ Although there is no evidence to suggest that Socialist militants took part in the general strike and demonstrations of 12 February, a police report described a joint meeting between Radicals, Communists and Socialists as early as 16 February in Thionville.²⁸⁹ The meeting, organised by a Radical lawyer, Maître Bresitroff, gathered forty people and discussed, as the report put it, '*les mesures à prendre en vue de riposter à la provocation [franciste] de dimanche 25 février 1934*'.²⁹⁰ As demonstrated earlier, the Communists were leading the common front in the *département* and the joint meeting of 16 February, which resulted in a vague promise from all parties to organise a counter-demonstration against the Francistes, seems to be the Socialists' sole participation following 6 February. On 7 July 1934, before the party's national authorities had officially agreed to join the PCF in the common front, Paul Féry, president of the party's *départementale* federation and the Metz section, argued the necessity to unite the two parties in the fight against fascism.²⁹¹

Even though Féry supported the idea of the common front, the relations between his party and the PCF were far from ideal. A few days after the signature of the pact of unity and a week before Marcel Bucard, leader of the *ligue* Francisme, embarked upon a well-publicised tour the Moselle, the Socialists rejected the Communist invitation to a meeting whose aim was to discuss the visit

²⁸⁷ AN, Blum papers, 'La Motion de Toulouse', 23 mai 1934, 570AP12.

²⁸⁸ The Archives Départementales de la Moselle and the Archives Départementales du Bas-Rhin hold police reports pertaining to the SFIO but many were misled during the German annexation (1940-1945).

²⁸⁹ Police reports suggested that the CGTU led the demonstrations in the Moselle on 12 February.

²⁹⁰ ADM, Rapport du commissaire de police de Thionville au sous-préfet, 17 February 1934, 24Z15.

²⁹¹ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz, 9 juillet 1934, 24Z16. The report noted that Féry was the only speaker to use French at the meeting. The other speakers, all Communists, used German.

of Bucard in the *département*.²⁹² In September 1934, when all political parties were preparing for the October cantonal elections, the SFIO did not take part in the discussions with the PCF on the electoral strategy of the common front. According to a police report, '*le parti communiste éprouverait certaines difficultés pour l'établissement de listes uniques avec les Socialistes ... pour le deuxième tour. Ces difficultés prouveraient le désintéressement ... du parti SFIO.*'²⁹³ And later in the year another police report described the Socialist position with regards to the common front in the following terms:

*Les partisans du Front commun sont nombreux mais en désaccord fréquent. Si bien que les résultats obtenus sont médiocres. Les dirigeants communistes Friedrich, Noll et Kirsch ainsi que le Secrétaire Fédéral socialiste Féry se rencontrent encore quelquefois au siège de « L'Humanité » de Metz... Mais ce dernier n'est pas suivi par ses amis politiques ... [les Socialistes] redoutent d'être absorbés par [le parti communiste] qui resterait seul bénéficiaire de la conjonction socialo-communiste.*²⁹⁴

Unlike their leader Féry, who seemed to have embraced the cause of the common front, the local Socialists openly criticised it. They believed the Communists were using it as a means to absorb the Socialist masses in their party. Their suspicion of Communist motives is not surprising. What is less obvious is why the Socialists did not build, or at least try to influence, the *département's* antifascist movement. Firstly, it would appear that the federation of the SFIO experienced difficulties after the scission with the Néos in 1933. Despite the party's claim that '*le départ des néos n'avait en rien troublé la fédération de la Moselle*', various police sources reveal that the split did in fact destabilise the federation.²⁹⁵ One report stated that the Socialist party in the Moselle had been in turmoil since the creation of the Parti des Socialistes de France: '*Il y a désaccord*

²⁹² The meeting was to discuss the course of action to take against Bucard's visit in the *département*, which lasted over one week. ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 7 août 1934, 98AL683.

²⁹³ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire spécial au sous-préfet, Thionville, 10 septembre 1934, 98AL683.

²⁹⁴ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 29 décembre 1934, 98AL683.

²⁹⁵ Paul Féry, 'Le Congrès Fédéral de la Moselle s'est tenu a Metz le 4 février dernier', *La Bataille*, mars 1934, p.2.

*au sein [du parti socialiste] depuis la création du parti des Socialistes de France*²⁹⁶, and another that *'les scissions qui se sont produites depuis la constitution du parti des Socialistes de France ... [ont] jeté la perturbation parmi les membres des sections mosellanes'*.²⁹⁷

Secondly, it is reasonable to assume that the SFIO simply did not possess the necessary numbers to shift the balance of power in the coalition.²⁹⁸ Whereas the party at the national level could rely on the large federations of the Seine, the Nord or the South-West and a large group of parliamentarians at the National Assembly, the Mosellan activists were far less numerous than the Communists. Due to this imbalance, they probably felt they could do little to resist a Communist takeover and consequently delayed as long as they could their participation to the coalition.

The CGT and CGTU

On the eve of the formation of the Popular Front, both the CGT and the CGTU were in decline. According to Antoine Prost, their national numbers had sharply declined since the schism of 1921 and by 1934 they totalled less than 755,000: 491,000 for the CGT and 264,000 for the CGTU.²⁹⁹ Prost argues that the scission and the hostile relations between the two unions were partly responsible for the decline in French workers' unionisation. In 1934, the leaders were Léon Jouhaux for the CGT and Benoît Frachon for the CGTU. So different were their characters and political paths that the reunification of their unions seemed almost impossible to achieve from the onset. But after the successful general strike of 12 February, which Frachon called *'une démonstration d'unité d'action révolutionnaire contre le fascisme'* and the U-turn operated by the PCF in June 1934, the CGTU

²⁹⁶ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz au préfet, 8 novembre 1934, 24Z15.

²⁹⁷ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 29 décembre 1934, 98AL683.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.* The police estimated that while the number of Front commun supporters ranged between 3,000 and 4,000, the SFIO had *'des effectifs squelettiques'* with sections in Thionville, Metz, Montigny-lès-Metz, Ars-sur-Moselle, Sarreguemines, Sarrebourg, Saint-Avold, Forbach and Merlebach. The PCF counted roughly 200 Socialist activists in the Moselle; in ADSSD, 'Informations sur la Situation en Alsace-Lorraine, 18 mai 1934', 3Mi6/108 séquence 706.

²⁹⁹ Prost, *Autour du Front Populaire*, p.153.

bombarded the CGT with calls for unity.³⁰⁰ Frachon recalls in his memoirs: '*La CGTU accorda le plus grand soin à l'unité des rangs*' before remarking '*la CGT, pour sa part, s'entêta à repousser nos propositions de discussion au niveau national*'.³⁰¹

For as long as he could, Jouhaux refused the CGTU's invitations. Just like the PCF had done with the SFIO, the CGTU had vilified the CGT as traitors, and Jouhaux could not forget the thirteen-year long antagonism which had existed between the two organisations. But the damage caused by Laval's deflationary policy was paralysing the economy and intensifying the demands of his own rank and file for unity. He therefore yielded and argued in principle to unity. Whereas he held out for unity at the level of unions and federations, the CGTU insisted upon unity at the top. Even when Jouhaux conceded this, other differences remained on the structure of the unified CGT, its independence vis-à-vis political parties, its programme and its position towards the Popular Front.³⁰² So determined were the Communists to complete the merger that they gave way on the principles of structure and political independence and Frachon was made to resign from the party's Central Committee.³⁰³ The merger, confirmed at the congress of the reunited CGT in Toulouse in March 1936, marked a significant leap forward for the French left.

But fifteen years of antagonism could not simply be swept aside, and the internal battles between the *ex-confédérés* and the *ex-unitaires* outlived the united CGT. A police report of July 1936 commented on the struggle for power within the new CGT:

l'entente n'est pas parfaite au sein de la CGT où des oppositions de plus en plus vives se manifestent entre les ex-dirigeants confédérés

³⁰⁰ Benoît Frachon, *Pour la CGT: Mémoires de Lutte 1902-1939*, Paris: Editions Sociales, 1981, p.167.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² The CGTU favoured a centralised structure, collaboration with the PCF and the programme of the *Rassemblement populaire*. The CGT insisted on keeping the federative structure already in place within its organisation, political independence and the doctrine of *Planisme*.

³⁰³ Reunification was announced by Jouhaux and Julien Racamond, another leader of the CGTU, at the Salle de la Mutualité in Paris on 28 January 1936. An interim board of seven members (two CGTU and five CGT) was established in order to resolve outstanding issues in time for the Toulouse Congress in March.

*et unitaires. Le Parti Communiste continue à jouer son rôle ... et ... ses éléments s'emparent peu à peu des directives syndicales.*³⁰⁴

By uniting its forces into one single union, the new CGT instilled hope and confidence in the hearts of millions of workers. No sooner had those hopes materialised in May 1936 with the Popular Front's victory that the CGT was faced with a challenge that would test its leadership even more: the unexpected wave of strikes that swept through the country.

In the Moselle, apart from the industrial districts between Metz and Thionville, the west of Thionville and Forbach, left-wing trade unions were rare.³⁰⁵ In December 1934, the Mosellan CGT was known as the Cartel Départemental des Syndicats Confédérés de la Moselle and gathered various unions at the *départemental* level. The CGTU was still organised at a regional level and was attached to the Union Régionale Unitaire d'Alsace-Lorraine with headquarters in Strasbourg. Until June 1934, the Communist trade union's position was unequivocal: '*nous ne marcherons jamais dans la combine [du] front unique avec tous les éléments chauvins.*'³⁰⁶ The issue of an independent Alsace-Lorraine was still high on the agenda of the regional union of the CGTU in early 1934 and the CGT was often accused of chauvinism. But in June the CGTU followed the PCF's line and sent its first invitation for joint action to the CGT. At the latter's *départemental* congress in Metz two weeks earlier, the leaders had already posed the first condition for joint action: '*la cessation de toutes les attaques et calomnies, soit sur des personnes, soit sur des organisations.*'³⁰⁷

In August 1934, the workers at the Manufacture des Tabacs in Metz tried to merge their unions into a single CGT union but as they could not agree on a choice of leader the project was abandoned.³⁰⁸ By the end of the summer the reunification had made little progress and despite the CGTU's repeated calls the

³⁰⁴ APPP, 'Rapport sur la lutte des tendances au sein de la CGT', 30 juillet 1936, BA2340.

³⁰⁵ In the cantons of Château-Salins, Sarrebourg and Sarreguemines police reports counted no union or federation (ADM, 310M95).

³⁰⁶ 'Du Travail et du Pain pour tous', *Der Hütten-Prolet*, Marz 1934, p.3.

³⁰⁷ *Le Travailleur de la Moselle*, juin 1934, p.1.

³⁰⁸ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 5 janvier 1935, 310M95.

police reported that '*la campagne menée en faveur de l'unité syndicale n'a encore abouti à aucune fusion*'.³⁰⁹ The same report blamed the lack of progress on the slow negotiations at the national level: '*on peut supposer ... [que l'unité] ... ne se réalisera dans notre région qu'au cas où un accord interviendrait entre les grandes fédérations respectives*.' The slow process may also be explained by the lack of representation in some parts of the *département*. In the Thionville and Basse-Yutz railway unions, the CGTU dominated a quasi-inexistent CGT. A similar situation existed in the Communist strongholds of Amnéville and Montigny-lès-Metz where the CGTU dominated since 1919. In Metz, however, the CGT controlled many of the unions, particularly among civil servants and factory workers, and the CGTU never succeeded in establishing a base there. But despite these hurdles, the reunification process gained momentum in the second half of 1935.

By mid-1935, the railways unions had made some remarkable progress and after what a *commissaire spécial* called '*une intense campagne de propagande ... menée en particulier par les cheminots unitaires*', talks between the representatives of the two trade unions finally began.³¹⁰ After painstaking negotiations, they merged into the Union Unifiée des Cheminots d'Alsace et de Lorraine in Strasbourg on 1 December 1935. Joining forces with the CGT and the CGTU were two local left-wing unions, the Syndicat des Echelles 5 à 10 and the Fédération des syndicats professionnels des cheminots.³¹¹ Based in Strasbourg, the freshly-created union formed a Mosellan committee, headed by Stosse, an *ex-confédéré*, and based in Metz. The achievement of the railway unions was exemplary and paved the way towards the unification of other unions.

On 22 December, the representatives of the interim Union Départementale des Syndicats Confédérés et Unitaires met in Metz to finalise the details of the congress of unification planned for 5 January 1936. The only two remaining points of friction by the end of December were, according to the *préfet*, '*la désignation du*

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz au préfet, 4 janvier 1936, 310M95.

³¹¹ The unification of the railway unions at the national level occurred at the salle de la Mutualité in Paris on 8 and 9 December 1935.

*futur secrétaire permanent départemental et sa rétribution éventuelle.*³¹² On 5 January, in Metz, in front of 150 delegates representing over 10,000 supporters and thirty-five unions, the two trade unions' representatives sealed the reunification process and elected Alphonse Rieth, an *ex-confédéré* from Forbach, new leader of the Union Départementale des Syndicats Unifiés (UD) and Schwob, an *ex-unitaire* from Thionville, new deputy leader. The *ex-confédérés* were by then more numerous than the *ex-unitaires*: 70 percent of the members of the new Union Départementale des Syndicats Unifiés were *ex-confédérés*. At the national congress of reunification of the CGT in Toulouse in March, Rieth represented the *départemental* union.

More delicate than the union of the political parties, the fusion of the CGT was handicapped by serious issues. As at the national level, the local unions were faced with tactical issues: who would be new leader, a *confédéré* or a *unitaire*? What would happen to the dependence of the CGTU upon the PCF? What role would the union assume within the Popular Front and which program would it adopt? But mirroring the Moselle's distinct social and political legacy, the two trade unions faced other challenges such as geographical organisation, culture and language: should the union be organised at regional or *départemental* level? Where should headquarters be: Metz or Strasbourg? What language should be used in the official literature? What of the question of independence of Alsace-Lorraine so dear to the CGTU: should it be sacrificed in order to support the reunification? Through the numerous meetings that occurred after the summer of 1935, the unions overcame such impediments and notwithstanding the paternalistic and authoritarian management style of the local *patronat* and the workers' lack of interest in left-wing social and political representation, the two trade unions accepted that joint action was necessary and possible. Moreover, the reunification gave the Mosellan workers a taste of independence vis-à-vis Strasbourg with the creation of the UD; unions that had been dominated by Strasbourg came to exist in a *départemental* structure with central offices and

³¹² ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 28 décembre 1935, 310M95.

leaders based in Metz.³¹³ On the eve of the May 1936 elections, only two trade unions remained: the aforementioned UD and the Christian Syndicats Indépendants d'Alsace-Lorraine, which had the support of the Union Républicaine Lorraine and the Action Catholique Lorraine.

Part Three: The Right

By early 1934, the forces of the right were divided into numerous political parties and *ligues*. The political right had won a narrow victory in the legislative elections in 1928, but after the left's success in 1932, the right-wing parties remained divided. Among those were Marin's Fédération Républicaine, Auguste Champetier de Ribes's Christian Parti Démocrate Populaire, Pierre-Etienne Flandin's secular Alliance Démocratique and the Mosellan Union Républicaine Lorraine by then also known as Union Républicaine Démocratique. As for the *ligues*, they were equally disunited. Notwithstanding a few doctrinal differences, they upheld principles of patriotism, authoritarianism and a profound dislike of Communism. Their forces were dispersed among several organisations such as the nationalistic Croix de Feu, the patriotic Jeunesses Patriotes, the monarchist Action Française and the self-proclaimed fascist Francistes.

After February 1934 and the right's return to power, the political right and the *ligues* informally agreed on a truce as they collectively supported Doumergue's government of national unity. But by the end of 1934, owing to Doumergue's inability to resolve the economic crisis, the right entered a chaotic period. Indeed, an examination of the right in the period 1934-1936 reveals that as the formation of the Popular Front gained momentum the right refused to form alliances. Moreover, dissent increased the political parties' rank and file as many lost faith in traditional politics and turned to the more radical *ligues*. In light of all this, the purpose of this third part is to answer the following two questions: to what extent

³¹³ Before the reunification, the trade unions from the steelworks of Thionville and the miners of Forbach, both led by the CGTU, were attached to Strasbourg and had no links with their counterparts in the Moselle.

did the emerging Popular Front unite or divide the forces of the right and the *ligues*? To what extent did it drive them to radicalise?

In order to answer these questions, the first section will examine the case of the political right through a study of three parties that counted Mosellan deputies and senators within their ranks: the Fédération Républicaine, the Parti Démocrate Populaire and the Union Républicaine Lorraine/Union Républicaine Démocratique. The second section will explore the influence of the Mosellan Catholic clergy and the Action Catholique Lorraine on local politics. The final section will offer an account of the *ligues*' position and in particular the Croix de Feu, Francisme and a local *ligue*, Neue Front.

The Parliamentary Right

Until February 1934, relations between the two national Catholic parties, the Parti Démocrate Populaire and the Fédération Républicaine, had been difficult. The latter often described the former as a party of '*rouges chrétiens*' and '*socialistes de droite*', torn between their progressive followers and their conservative Catholic network of notables.³¹⁴ The Parti Démocrate Populaire referred to Marin as '*un égaré dans la politique*' incapable of leading a party that was divided between its pro-Republican and its pro-fascist elements.³¹⁵ The Parti Démocrate Populaire, whose doctrine rejected the *ligues*' antirepublicanism and extremism, had indeed adopted an ambiguous position towards the demonstrators of 6 February. Some in the right wing of the party sympathised with the rioters - mainly because of the presence of war veterans on the streets of Paris that night - while others wholly condemned their anti-democratic actions. As for the Fédération Républicaine, it

³¹⁴ AN, Marin papers, copie d'un article 'Les Démocrates Chrétiens (qui se disent populaires), voilà l'ennemi!', estimated date circa 1932, 317AP169.

³¹⁵ Jean-Claude Delbreil, *Centrisme et Démocratie Chrétienne en France, le Parti Démocrate Populaire des origines au M.R.P. (1919-1944)*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1990, p.293.

unanimously described the riots of 6 February as a '*magnifique mouvement d'opinion*'.³¹⁶

Immediately after those events the Fédération Républicaine tried to form a wide parliamentary coalition in order to support Doumergue's government, but the Parti Démocrate Populaire refused to participate. In July 1934, it was the turn of Champetier de Ribes to call for a large centre party that would include among others his own party, the Fédération Républicaine, the Alliance Démocratique and those Radicals who refused joint action with the SFIO. But his efforts proved fruitless since, as the police reported, the Parti Démocrate Populaire '*n'a reçu que des paroles évasives de la part de la plupart des chefs des divers groupes politiques*'.³¹⁷ At the Fédération Républicaine, Champetier de Ribes was mocked and accused of playing a double game since only a few months earlier he had refused to join the coalition Marin had proposed. It is clear that by trying to form a centre party in which the Parti Démocrate Populaire would play a pivotal role between the Fédération Républicaine and the Radical-Socialists and by challenging the left's common front and the *ligues*' Front National, - which shall be discussed later - Champetier de Ribes was mainly hoping to reduce his losses at the next elections.

In September 1934, André Tardieu from the Alliance Démocratique and Marcel Déat, the Socialist defector who founded of the néo-Socialiste party, tried to promote unity by inviting all conservatives to enter their republican front which they described as a third way between a radicalised right and a united left. Fearing that French politics were being polarised further by the presence of the *front unique* on the left and the organisation of a Front National on the far right, they sought to create a large coalition of right and centre-right parties that would in effect '*prendre position contre la politique des deux blocs, contre les perspectives de guerre civile et de dictature qu'elle implique [et] s'enfoncer entre le Front Unique et le Front National*'.³¹⁸ The Parti Démocrate Populaire initially responded

³¹⁶ AN, Marin papers, Lettre de Louis Marin aux membres du parti, décembre 1934, 317AP72.

³¹⁷ APPP, Rapport de police, 18 juillet 1934, BA1897.

³¹⁸ Marceau Pivert, 'Le Front Républicain', *Le Populaire de l'Est*, 2 septembre 1934, p.2.

favourably to Tardieu's invitation as it corresponded to its refusal of the two blocs' politics, but in the end, fearing for the party's independence and unity, it turned the invitation down.

As for the Fédération Républicaine, it also rejected Tardieu's proposal but in preparation for the October 1934 cantonal elections it urged its *départemental* federations to '*désigner les candidats dans les rangs du parti ou, en cas d'exception, suivant le principe d'un pacte de désistement mutuel entre partisans de la politique d'Union Nationale*'.³¹⁹ Although there were no clear guidelines as to which parties the '*partisans de l'Union Nationale*' should belong to, the Council issued a motion which clarified its message:

*Fidèle à ... l'esprit de redressement national du 6 février ... la Fédération Républicaine de France ... considérant que le Front Commun prétend utiliser les élections cantonales contre le Président [du Conseil] Doumergue et la politique de trêve, réclame et exige qu'on ne voie plus ses représentants officiels soutenir des candidats qui combattent la politique du Gouvernement.*³²⁰

Even though the motion indicates that the Fédération Républicaine acknowledged the significance of the truce among right-wing parties and the threat of a united left, it also highlights the party's limits as to how far it was prepared to go: yes for an informal electoral strategy but no to a formal electoral alliance. The Fédération Républicaine, just like the Parti Démocrate Populaire, was unwilling to take the truce any further.

Another instance of the two parties' immobility occurred when the two parties failed to form an alliance with Flandin's Alliance Démocratique for the May 1935 municipal elections. Marin was aware of the impact a united left could have on the French electorate. As a police report noted,

*preoccupés du danger que l'accord conclu entre les socialistes et les communistes fera courir, en Mai [1935], à un certain nombre de candidats nationaux ... les secrétaires régionaux de la Fédération Républicaine ... et du Parti Démocrate Populaire procèdent à des enquêtes dans les quartiers de Paris.*³²¹

³¹⁹ AN, Marin papers, note pour la presse, Paris, 5 septembre 1934, 317AP82.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ APPP, Rapport de police, 27 octobre 1934, BA1897.

Their '*enquêtes*' concluded that although '*il faut prévoir des pertes de sièges ... ce serait miracle ... si [certains] conseillers nationaux pouvaient résister à la coalition des socialistes et des communistes.*'³²² Even though both parties recognised the need for unity, their efforts did not materialise. Their inability or unwillingness to collaborate combined with the left's strategy of a Popular Front resulted in the highly-charged symbolic defeat of George Lebecq, one of the leading protesters on 6 February, and the victory of Paul Rivet of the Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels Antifascistes (CVIA) in Paris's 5th arrondissement.³²³ Rivet won thanks to the second round agreement between the SFIO, the PCF and the Radicals after the Communist and Socialist candidates agreed to stand down in his favour.

In the Moselle, the Union Républicaine Lorraine, considered by the *préfet* as '*le plus puissant parti politique de la Moselle*' remained more a loose association of local notables than a real political organisation.³²⁴ It did not possess a leader or a defined political agenda and relied on the Catholic *Le Lorrain* to spread its message. Because there was no party capable of challenging the Union Républicaine Lorraine's hegemony, the latter did not face the obstacles met by the Fédération Républicaine and the Parti Démocrate Populaire. Indeed, the results of the 1934 cantonal elections indicate that the Union Républicaine Lorraine easily secured the majority of seats in the *départementale* assembly. Out of the eighteen seats available for election, the Union Républicaine Lorraine/Union Républicaine Démocratique won fifteen and Antoni's Christlich-Soziale Partei the remaining three.³²⁵ It was therefore to its right and not to its left that the Union Républicaine Lorraine's hegemony was challenged.

The three Autonomist seats were in Fénétrange, Sarralbe and Phalsbourg, three towns located in the German-speaking zone of the *département*. In the case

³²² *Ibid.* The investigation concluded that the right most certainly would lose four seats in the municipal council in the 4th, 15th, 18th and 20th *arrondissements*, and possibly three more in the 5th, 9th and 10th *arrondissements*.

³²³ The CVIA was an antifascist organisation founded in the wake of the riots of 6th February 1934 by the philosopher Alain, the physicist Paul Langevin and the ethnologist Paul Rivet.

³²⁴ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 22 septembre 1934, 98AL1069-1.

³²⁵ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 17 octobre 1934, 98AL1069-1.

of Fénétrange, the *préfet* noted that collusion between some of the Communist electorate and the Christlich-Soziale Partei led to the victory of Antoni, the Autonomist candidate. As he wrote, '*cette collusion a constitué le facteur déterminant du succès de M Antoni.*'³²⁶ Though it is not clear why some Communist supporters voted for the Autonomist candidate (the PCF presented a candidate at the first and second round) their behaviour might have been motivated by rational thinking. By voting for the Autonomist candidate regardless of his political allegiance, they expressed their desire to see the Autonomist cause represented at the *départemental* assembly. Though there is no evidence to suggest this claim, it is also possible that the Autonomist party broke a deal with the Communists who supported them at the second round. Thus, the political colour of the newly elected *départemental* assembly of October 1934 remained unchanged: the assembly elected Guy de Wendel president and *abbé* Ritz secretary-general. A year later, Robert Sérot, the Union Républicaine Lorraine deputy for Metz Campagne, was elected vice-president.

This was confirmed at the May 1935 municipal elections, which are seen by some historians as '*le véritable acte de naissance électoral du Front populaire*', as Yuan Combeau puts it.³²⁷ They are indeed fundamental in the understanding of the relations between the emerging Popular Front and the right. They were the last national consultation before the 1936 legislative elections and revealed a noticeable swing to the left, at least at the national level. In the Moselle, however, the Union Républicaine Lorraine's victory was unequivocal: it won 93 percent of the municipalities (707 out of 764). In his position as mayor of Metz and a leading member of the Union Républicaine Lorraine, Vautrin made public his position towards the Popular Front one month before the elections,

Nous prenons l'engagement sur parole d'honneur de nous placer sans réserve sur le terrain national ... [et] de répudier toute adhésion et toute collaboration à une liste communiste, socialiste ou associée dans un front commun. Nous ne permettons aucune distinction ...

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ Yuan Combeau, 'Les Elections Municipales de 1935: acte de naissance électoral du Front populaire', *L'Information Historique*, 56, 1994, p.195.

*entre les partis politiques depuis l'extrême droite jusque et y compris les Socialistes de France.*³²⁸

Vautrin's message echoed the local right's general attitude of hostility towards the common front's candidates and the rather sympathetic stance towards the far right and the Néo-socialists. It appears that Vautrin need not have worried by making such declarations as his list won all the seats in Metz.

The Mosellan results revealed not only the poor performance of the left but also the right's lack of discipline in some parts of the *département*. The left lost Rombas and Basse-Yutz, two Communist bastions that had played a key role in the fight against fascism and the *ligues*.³²⁹ And in Hayange, despite the victory of Communist dissident Béron in the first round, Guy de Wendel's Union Républicaine Démocratique list won a majority of seats in the municipal council. The PCF preserved Amnéville, Hagondange and Saint-Julien-lès-Metz and won the industrial bastion of Mondelange, lost by the right because of its inability to resolve '*des rivalités de personnes et la désunion des modérés*', as a police report suggested.³³⁰ As for the Socialists, they conquered the town of Petite-Rosselle, situated in the de Wendel mining district in the French Saarland. On the face of it, the Popular Front secured one important victory: Sarreguemines with the election of Socialist Nicklaus. His list, comprising Communists, Socialists and Union Républicaine Lorraine dissidents, defeated the list presented by Henri Nominé, the town's Union Républicaine Lorraine deputy-mayor. Nicklaus's feat, however, should not be taken at face value. Indeed, it appears that his victory was only made possible thanks to the support of the Union Républicaine Lorraine dissidents. Nominé's list won eight seats, the dissidents Union Républicaine Lorraine's seven and Nicklaus's list twelve. These results suggest that had the Union Républicaine Lorraine remained united, the left probably would have been

³²⁸ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 20 avril 1935, 98AL1065-3.

³²⁹ In March 1934, Barbian, the mayor of Rombas, was arrested and condemned by the *préfet* for having organised an antifascist demonstration against a group of Italian Fascists; ADM, Rapport du préfet, Metz, 27 mars 1934, 24Z16. One month later, Barbian was once again arrested with Fritsch for having participated in a violent demonstration involving antifascists and Francistes in Thionville. Soon after, the *préfet* removed Barbian and Fritsch from their positions of mayors.

³³⁰ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 15 mai 1935, 98AL1065-3.

defeated. The *département*'s only Popular Front victory was thus due to the right's disagreement rather than the left's unity.

The Sarreguemines election illustrates that even if the left had applied the strategy of a united front throughout the *département* it would have been extremely difficult to defeat the Union Républicaine Lorraine. As the *préfet* noted in a pre-election report,

*en dépit de multiples tentatives, pour rallier sous la bannière d'un parti ou d'une personnalité la masse ... [des] électeurs, aucune formation politique n'a réussi à triompher des tendances conservatrices et traditionnalistes ... [de l'Union Républicaine Lorraine].*³³¹

This explains the right's firm hold over the *département* and raises the question of whether the emerging Popular Front had any hope of altering this situation. Was the left doomed to lose and remain in the right's shadow or would the next general elections provide the opportunity the left was hoping for?

It is clear that by early 1936 the parliamentary right was divided. The Parti Démocrate Populaire and the Fédération Républicaine's political agenda, as well as those of other national right-wing political parties, were too contradictory to form an electoral or parliamentary agreement, and no party was willing to compromise. Although publicly they advocated a political truce and unity, they were too preoccupied with their own power struggle and failed to put their differences aside. They also failed to take the left seriously and consequently lost a few seats at the municipal elections. Perhaps a crisis similar to that of 6 February would have served the right by providing the catalyst it needed to join its forces; after all, it is highly probable that without the riots of the 6 February the left would never have engaged on the path to unity. The right was not unaware of the rising popularity of the Popular Front, but did the left represent a serious threat in 1934-1936? Or did the threat come from a decomposition of the right itself?

Laval's unpopular deflationist decrees in July 1935 caused a wave of discontent throughout the country and angered many traditional supporters of the

³³¹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 4 avril 1935, 98AL1065-3.

right. In his monthly report, the *préfet* noted '*les répercussions profondes*' and '*le mécontentement assez vif*' among the *département's fonctionnaires* and throughout the summer many demonstrated against the decrees, mainly under the auspices of the *fonctionnaire's* trade unions.³³² None of the demonstrations resulted in riots, but one of the indubitable consequences of the decrees was the radicalisation of many supporters of the right.³³³ In a letter to Jean Guiter, the Fédération Républicaine's secretary-general, a customs officer from the Moselle wrote, '*si les décrets-lois sont votés ... ce serait antifamilial et antisocial*' and hoped politicians would find less radical ways to '*équilibrer la solution difficile du déficit*'.³³⁴ In another letter, a member of the Fédération Républicaine wrote of his inability to accept the *décrets-lois* and '*[a] l'honneur de présenter sa démission de membre de la Fédération Républicaine*'.³³⁵ Many similar letters were received at the Fédération Républicaine's offices and among these several indicated the radicalisation of some of its supporters. Impatient before his party's support of such policies and its inability to solve the economic crisis, a party member from Saint-Etienne questioned Louis Marin's view of the Croix de Feu and asked why the Fédération Républicaine cast aside '*ce mouvement [qui] répond bien aux sentiments de gens que nous aurions pu attirer chez nous*'.³³⁶

The relations between the parliamentary right and the *ligues* took a singular turn in that period when many traditional right wingers, tired of traditional politics, turned to them. This trend confirms Kevin Passmore's view that 'it was out of a crisis of conservatism that fascism emerged'.³³⁷ In a letter to the Fédération Républicaine, a representative of the section of Vienne complained, '*on déserte notre parti pour les ligues. Nos amis sont sceptiques sur l'efficacité de l'action ... de nos représentants au gouvernement*' and added that he would like to see

³³² AN, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 25 juillet 1935, F7/13038.

³³³ Laval's decrees included a 10 percent decrease of the public sector employees' pay and a reduction of retail prices.

³³⁴ AN, Marin papers, Lettre de Lucien Lingenheim au parti de la Fédération Républicaine de France, 13 juillet 1935, 317AP72.

³³⁵ AN, Marin papers, Lettre de Edmond Maillard, 17 juillet 1935, 317AP72.

³³⁶ AN, Marin papers, Lettre de Georges Neyret, 26 juin 1935, 317AP72.

³³⁷ Passmore, *From liberalism to fascism*, p.xii

'l'intransigeance nécessaire pour barrer la route au front commun'.³³⁸ At a meeting gathering the Jeunesses Patriotes, the Solidarité Française and the Action Française in August 1935, Philippe Henriot, deputy for the Gironde and a leading member of the Fédération Républicaine, summarised his position: *'qu'il soit république autoritaire, fascisme, roi, nous suivrons le régime qui aura sauvé la France'*.³³⁹ Even though Henriot's declaration did not meet with Marin's agreement, it nonetheless reflected the drift to the far right of a growing minority within the ranks of the political right. In the Moselle, the Union Républicaine Lorraine/Union Républicaine Démocratique had always entertained good relations with the *ligues* and important members of the party such as Ritz did not hesitate to openly support them (see chapter One).

The Catholic Clergy

By 1934 Mosellan Catholics were also divided between two blocs: the Action Catholique Lorraine, which counted roughly 35,000 members in 1934, and the Volksbund.³⁴⁰ While the first was chiefly found in the Metz area and was closely linked to the Catholic political right, the second had many followers in the south-eastern cantons bordering Germany and Alsace and supported Antoni's Christlich-Soziale Partei. Their poor relations notwithstanding, the two groups were, as reported by the police, united in their loathing of *'les activités du gouvernement cartelliste, radical-socialiste et socialiste'*, Communism and other secular organisations *'qui ont pour but la destruction de la morale et de l'école chrétienne'* and their support of the Doumergue government.³⁴¹

Due to the large number of Mosellans supporting the Action Catholique Lorraine and the latter's close relation with the Mosellan right, the Catholic association deserves particular attention. Although it publicly denied any political allegiance or role, the Action Catholique Lorraine claimed that as a religiously-

³³⁸ AN, Marin papers, Lettre de E. Chenebon, Vienne, 23 juin 1935, 317AP80.

³³⁹ AN, Marin papers, Lettre de Jean Guiter à Louis Marin, Paris, 5 septembre 1935, 317AP80.

³⁴⁰ AN, Rapport de police, Metz, 25 février 1934, F7/14614.

³⁴¹ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines, 12 janvier 1934, F7/14614.

focused organisation it had a moral obligation to educate the Catholic masses and guide them in their civic duty. Boiteux, president of the Action Catholique Lorraine, defined the association as *'ni un parti politique, ni une organisation électorale mais un vaste organisme destiné à réunir tous les Catholiques dans la défense des intérêts de la patrie'*.³⁴² Ritz's message echoed Boiteux's: *'Le catholique se doit d'être à la fois le bon citoyen de la Cité du Monde et de la Cité de Dieu ... [son] devoir politique ... est d'aider au redressement de la France'* regardless of the form of the regime.³⁴³ As long as the latter was not *'incompatible avec la vie religieuse, l'action catholique, la mission de l'Eglise'* Ritz and the Action Catholique Lorraine encouraged Mosellan Catholics to support their government, whether they be *'republicain, royaliste, bonapartiste, fasciste ou autre'*.³⁴⁴ The Action Catholique Lorraine also believed that its duty was to guide its flock in the meanders of French foreign policy. Its message, full of nationalistic references, emphasised the need for a resolute and determined France vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and its rising German neighbour, which Ritz described as *'exécrable par essence et [qui] doit être brisé sans pitié, sans remords'*.³⁴⁵ Ritz's nationalism was so virulent that he described himself as *'le théologien du nationalisme'*.³⁴⁶

Regarding the events of February 1934 and their effect on French politics, the Mosellan clergy clearly supported the rioters of 6 February and the right's return to power. In his newspaper, Ritz described the victims of 6 February as *'les pauvres tués de la Concorde [qui] voulaient que la République française cesse d'être un gouvernement de voleurs'*.³⁴⁷ Similarly, various police reports communicated the Action Catholique Lorraine and the Volskbund's strong support of the right's return to power.³⁴⁸ At an Action Catholique Lorraine meeting held in Metz on 25 February 1934, before an audience of 2,000 people comprising of prominent political and religious personalities such as Schuman, Monseigneur Pelt

³⁴² AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz, 11 mars 1935, F7/14614.

³⁴³ Ritz, 'Les Catholiques Français et la Vie Politique', *Le Lorrain*, 11 février 1934, p.1

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ Cartier, Raymond, 'L'Abbé Ritz et le maire Vautrin', *L'Illustré Messin*, 4 janvier 1935, p.1.

³⁴⁶ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial Metz Gare Centrale, 23 mars 1926, F7/13233.

³⁴⁷ *Le Lorrain*, 13 février 1934, p.1.

³⁴⁸ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial au sous-préfet, Sarreguemines, 1er mai 1934, F7/14614.

(bishop of Metz), Guy de Wendel, Paul Vautrin and many local councillors, Boiteux publicly agreed with Ritz's sympathetic description of the rioters of 6 February and celebrated the fall of the Radical governments of Chautemps and Daladier.³⁴⁹ It was during this meeting that Schuman was appointed honorary president of the Action Catholique Lorraine because of his efforts to stop Guy de la Chambre's circulaire which proposed a change in the regulation pertaining to religious education in Alsatian and Mosellan schools. As Raymond Poidevin duly writes, '*Dans l'entre-deux guerres la bataille pour le maintien du Concordat en Alsace-Lorraine est inséparable de la question scolaire. Schuman s'engage à fond dans ce combat.*'³⁵⁰ Indeed, Schuman and the rest of his party posed as the defenders of the Church's special status and assured the Mosellan Catholics that, as reported by the police, '*à aucun prix il ne laissera toucher au statut scolaire*'.³⁵¹

With regards to the left's common front and the fight against fascism, the Mosellan clergy's position was clear. Based on its intrinsic loathing of Communism and laicism, represented by organisations such as the CGT and the PCF, the Mosellan clergy wholly rejected the Popular Front. At the Action Catholique Lorraine's annual general assembly held in Metz on 15 February 1934, the canon Louis reminded his audience of the dangers of freemasonry '*qui, sous des masques différents (socialisme, CGT, etc) cherche à tromper la bonne foi de gens non avertis*'.³⁵² As for Ritz, he strongly encouraged his Catholic readership to fight the left and follow the parties of order such as the Union Républicaine Lorraine. As he wrote in February 1934,

*Il n'est écrit dans aucun catéchisme qu'un catholique français doive... faire le bon enfant de cœur ... dans toutes les sacristies radicales et socialistes du régime. La conscience d'un catholique ne pourra jamais lui imposer d'accepter le rôle de valet que les partis de gauche lui font remplir.*³⁵³

³⁴⁹ AN, Rapport de la police d'état de Metz, 25 février 1934, F7/14614.

³⁵⁰ Raymond Poidevin, *Robert Schuman: homme d'état*, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1986, p.46.

³⁵¹ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz, 26 février 1934, F7/14614.

³⁵² 'La Réunion Annuelle des Délégués de l'Action Catholique', *Le Lorrain*, 16 février 1934, p.3.

³⁵³ Ritz, 'Les Catholiques Français et la Vie Politique', *Le Lorrain*, 11 février 1934, p.1.

Likewise, the Volksbund warned its followers of what a police report described as '*les conséquences politiques désastreuses ... du marxisme au pouvoir... ce dernier [étant] l'amalgame des partis radical-socialiste, SFIO et communiste*'.³⁵⁴ According to Zentz, one of the main leaders of the Volksbund, only a stable and strong government based on the principles of Christian moral and religious ideal would avoid a victory of the left. So strong and persuasive was the clergy's anti-left message among the population that according to a police report, the May 1935 electoral campaign '*a fait ressortir l'influence prépondérante des milieux qui se réclament de l'Action Catholique*'.³⁵⁵ The report concluded with the following words: '*Partout, l'emprise du clergé demeure puissante*'.

Detrimental to the left's efforts, the Mosellan Catholic organisations' propaganda among the working class masses seemed to be most effective. Instead of the class against class struggle advocated by the Communist doctrine, many clergymen and politicians sought to resolve the economic crisis with the advent of a new order based on social justice and cooperation as well as Christian charity. At the Associations Catholiques de la Jeunesse Française's regional congress held in Thionville in September 1935, Debray, president of the association, declared in front of a 2,000-strong audience, '*nous nous organisons non pour une lutte de classe mais ... pour une action basée sur les principes du Christ*'.³⁵⁶ And speaking in the name of the Belgian youth group, canon Cardijn proclaimed, '*L'ouvrier n'est pas une machine, il ne doit pas travailler pour enrichir un patron mais, comme l'a voulu le Christ, pour gagner son pain quotidien, il doit être considéré comme le fils et l'héritier de Dieu*'.³⁵⁷ Based on the principles of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical letter *Rerum novarum* and reminiscent of the Parti Démocrate Populaire's programme, Christian socialism met with great success among the Mosellan working masses. As the police reported after the congress:

³⁵⁴ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines, 1er mai 1934, F7/14614.

³⁵⁵ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 15 mai 1935, 98AL/1065-3.

³⁵⁶ Present at the event were the bishops of Metz, Nancy and Verdun, and Schuman, who presided some of the discussions. AN, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 25 septembre 1935, F7/14614.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

'Ces théories sociales sont accueillies avec sympathie par les populations de la Moselle, où le prestige et l'autorité de l'Eglise Catholique demeurent puissants'.³⁵⁸

It is difficult to evaluate the actual role of the clergy within the context of the formation of the Popular Front and the effect it had on the emerging left-wing coalition. All the same, it is impossible to ignore the political weight of its organisations, and it seems evident that, despite its claims of apolitical principles, the local clergy's close relationship with the local right-wing political elite played a decisive role in the 1934 and 1935 elections. What is more, the clergy could rely on the support of organisations such as the Volksbund and the Action Catholique Lorraine and the silent approval of hundreds of thousands of fervent Catholics. Although it has not been possible to establish the number of Volksbund members, a police report stated that the organisation counted among its supporters 87 percent of the electorate in some parts of the *département*.³⁵⁹ The issue of the Concordat and the place of the Catholic Church in society are central in the understanding of the *département's* politics in the interwar years and it is therefore not surprising that Catholic politicians, journalists, businessmen and clergymen found themselves involved in the same organisations. Spirituality was not only part of their private lives; it had to be expressed in the public sphere and propagated whenever possible through their newspapers, public speeches and political action. But like right-wing political parties elsewhere in the country, the local Catholic clergy was divided.

The issue of Autonomism and Germany were at the core of the division within the Mosellan clergy. The Volksbund, whose motto was 'Religion first', advocated the use of German before that of French, favoured some form of administrative autonomy for the *département* and called for a revaluation of Germany's position on the international scene. According to a police report the Volksbund's position towards Germany in 1934 – one year after the Nazis' rise to power – was clear: it believed that the Versailles peace treaty '*avait fait fausse route à l'égard de l'Allemagne et trompé l'état actuel des esprits dans ce pays qui*

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Boulay, 6 mars 1933, F7/14614.

était las de se voir relégué au second plan et maintenu dans un état d'infériorité.³⁶⁰ It also criticised the League of Nations for maintaining '*la suprématie de la France en Europe*'. As for the local political scene, the Volskbund blamed the Union Républicaine Lorraine's parliamentarians' deplorable attitude vis-à-vis the protection of the *département's* religious status and praised Antoni's efforts. The Action Catholique Lorraine, under the authority of the diocese, tried to pacify its relations with the Volksbund by calling for what a police report described as '*l'union de tous les catholiques dans l'Action Catholique*'.³⁶¹ But differences were too deep-seated and the two organisations remained divided. The Moselle's cultural and linguistic frontier which had shaped political Catholicism since the early 1900s continued to divide Mosellan Catholics.

The tension between the two factions is reminiscent of the PCF's internal dissensions and eventual split in 1929, and highlights once again the importance of the German heritage and the issue of Autonomism. These two factors, which were intrinsically linked, split Mosellan society and politics throughout much of the interwar period. But regardless of the Catholics' lack of unity, the *département's* right wingers united against one common enemy: Communism. Exposed to the rise of a united left and the political right's inability to foster a sense of unity and action, many Mosellan right wingers radicalised and turned towards the *ligues*. Those Mosellans who grew weary of the *Français de l'Intérieur's* politics and of the right's disagreements were to find their most vocal representative in Ritz and *Le Lorrain*. When he asked himself in one of his articles, '*Quand donc nos frères de l'Intérieur auront-ils le sens de cette union? Comment voulons-nous gagner nos adversaires si nous saisissons... la torche de la discorde contre nos frères ?*' he presented the *ligues* and de la Rocque's Croix de Feu in particular as '*ce mouvement de réconciliation, d'ordre et d'honneur*' that would rid France and the Moselle of freemasonry.³⁶²

³⁶⁰ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Forbach, 23 avril 1934, F7/14614.

³⁶¹ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Boulay, 6 mars 1933, F7/14614.

³⁶² Croix de Feu de Metz, *Réflexions d'un Lorrain sur le Mouvement social français des Croix de Feu*, Metz: Imprimerie du Journal Le Lorrain, 1935, pp.8-10.

The *Ligues*

Neue Front, also known as Force Nouvelle, was founded in Strasbourg on 30 September 1933 and was first introduced in the Moselle in the Sarreguemines area a few months later.³⁶³ It embraced the principles of Corporatism, held Nazism and Fascism as models and advocated '*l'établissement d'un régime d'autorité dans un sens nettement fasciste*' according to a police report.³⁶⁴ It counted around 400 members in Sarreguemines in February 1934, and although it initially supported the truce advocated by the right, it soon embarked on a violent campaign against the parliamentary regime.³⁶⁵ Considered very active and effective by the prefectural authorities, the movement's violent tactics - its paramilitary troops often clashed with local Communists - and its rising popularity in the French Saarland resulted in the creation of the Moselle's first ANTIFA committees.

The first of the ANTIFA groups emerged in Sarreguemines in mid-January 1934 and gathered Radicals, Socialists and Communists. As in the rest of the *département* the Communists led the ANTIFA movement, and despite its repeated campaigns against Neue Front, the latter spread its activities in the surrounding towns and villages and attracted growing numbers of supporters (830 at the end of April 1934), including followers of two rival *ligues*, the Jeunesses Patriotes and the Solidarité Française.³⁶⁶ Neue Front's remit never expanded beyond the French Saarland and because its programme resembled that of the Christlich-Soziale Partei (without the paramilitary and fascist elements), the latter prevented it from developing. A police report offered a plausible explanation as to why Neue Front failed to expand its base further:

En général la population de notre région ne prend pas ses directives politiques en Alsace, mais suit plutôt les ... idées de la capitale.

³⁶³ ADM, Rapport du préfet aux sous-préfets, Metz, 28 décembre 1933, 24Z15.

³⁶⁴ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au directeur de la sûreté générale, 1er mars 1934, F7/13038.

³⁶⁵ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au préfet, 2 février 1934, 98AL695.

³⁶⁶ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au directeur de la sûreté générale, 3 mai 1934, F7/13038.

*C'est dire que Force Nouvelle n'a pas beaucoup de chance de trouver de trouver des adhérents [I]l est combattu par le parti "chrétien-social".*³⁶⁷

Founded by Marcel Bucard, a decorated war veteran, in September 1933, the *ligue* Francisme pledged to undertake France's second revolution. Its motto was *Paix, Justice* and *Ordre*, and the Francistes, the supporters of the *ligue*, were recognisable by their blue shirts. In the Moselle, Francisme gathered momentum after Bucard's visit in Metz on 26 February 1934 and soon appeared as the fastest growing *ligue* in the *département*.³⁶⁸ Indeed, according to a police report from Paris, '*si le parti franciste ne recrute plus que rares adhésions à Paris ... il n'en est pas de même dans l'Est où dans les régions de Metz et Thionville ses progrès sont assez marquants*'.³⁶⁹ In July 1934, the *ligue* opened the very first of its meeting place (*maison bleue*) in Basse-Yutz, a Communist stronghold, and Metz became the headquarters of the movement's Marne-Moselle regional federation – France's largest. Throughout 1934, Bucard's tours of the *département* attracted hundreds of sympathisers and the support of Metz's Francophone right-wing newspaper *Le Messin*, which saw in Bucard's *ligue* a shield against Communism. But despite its intense propaganda, Francisme never really established itself in the Moselle and by mid-1935 the movement was in serious decline. By then, despite Bucard's assertions and the fact that the Marne-Moselle federation was the largest in France, it appears that, as a police informer put it, '*contrairement aux indications de Marcel Bucard ... qui prétend que dans le l'Est le nombre des adhérents ... serait de plusieurs milliers, l'effectif dans la région Alsace-Lorraine-Vosges ne serait que de 800 à 900 membres, dont 500 réellement actifs*'.³⁷⁰

Why did Francisme fail to establish deeper roots in the *département*? Many factors worked against it, the first being its programme. On the face of it, Francisme may have appeared as an organisation close to the values of the

³⁶⁷ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz au préfet, 23 mars 1934, 24Z15.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ APPP, Rapport sur le parti Franciste, 4 mai 1934, BA1907.

³⁷⁰ APPP, 'Rapport sur le parti Franciste', 7 septembre 1934, BA1907. At the national level, Bucard claimed 25,000 supporters but the police reported no more than 7,000; in APPP, Rapport sur le parti Franciste, 13 juillet 1935, BA1907.

conservative and religious Mosellans: it was Catholic, regionalist but not Autonomist, anti-Socialist, anti-secular and anti-Communist; the subtitle of the *ligue's* newspaper *Le Franciste's* read *Organe de Documentation et de Combat contre le Bolchévisme*, and Bucard believed his movement's mission was to rid France of the Communists, 'ces faux patriotes made in Moscou' as he called them.³⁷¹ But two aspects of its programme would meet resistance and abhorrence among the local population: its call for a revolution and its support of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Bucard openly described himself a revolutionary fascist and called for 'une alliance totale avec l'Italie mussolinienne et la paix avec l'Allemagne hitlérienne' at the *ligue's* first national congress in June 1934.³⁷² During his tour of the Moselle in 1934, Bucard also called for what a police report described as 'un resserrement des relations franco-allemandes'.³⁷³ By and large Mosellans were not prone to revolutionary ideas and their vision of politics did not marry with one that identified itself with a foreign ideology whether it was Communism or Fascism. Likewise, they rejected Bucard's call to befriend Germany, a country where Catholics and conservatives were terrorised and submitted to the Nazi purge.

Another factor which may have held back Francisme was its constant lack of funds. Possibly because of its revolutionary aspect, the *ligue* never attracted the financial backing of the wealthy donors who backed up *ligues* as the Jeunesses Patriotes and the Solidarité Française.³⁷⁴ Its main sources of revenue originated from the sale of its newspaper and its members' subscriptions, but these quickly proved insufficient and the *ligue* found itself in serious financial difficulties in July 1935. This financial crisis coincided with the movement's decline in the Moselle and following a series of relatively unsuccessful meetings in the *département*,

³⁷¹ APPP, tract du Francisme, nd, BA1907.

³⁷² APPP, 'Rapport sur le premier congrès national du Francisme', Paris, 10 juin 1934, BA1907.

³⁷³ AN, Rapport du préfet au directeur de la sûreté générale, Metz, 25 juillet 1935, F7/13038.

³⁷⁴ The Jeunesses Patriotes was founded and funded, though not exclusively, by the financier and wine producer Pierre Taittinger in 1924. The Solidarité Française was funded by the wealthy perfumer and media tycoon Francois Coty; in 1927 Coty also supported the Croix de Feu by housing their central offices in *Le Figaro's* offices on the Champs-Élysées in Paris.

which Bucard himself presided, the movement almost disappeared.³⁷⁵ The *préfet* compared this decline with the steady rise of the concurrent Croix de Feu who '*progressivement étend ses ramifications sur tout le département*'.³⁷⁶

Founded originally as a veterans' organisation in 1927, the Croix de Feu quickly became the largest political organisation in France under the auspices of Lieutenant-Colonel François de la Rocque who rose to leadership in 1931. By July 1935 the French police estimated its membership at 240,000 and by January 1936 the figure rose to nearly half a million.³⁷⁷ As Soucy points out, the Croix de Feu's programme was very similar to that of Francisme.³⁷⁸ On the one hand, it glorified war veterans, patriotism, discipline, authoritarianism, Catholicism and class collaboration, while on the other it rejected parliamentary democracy, left-wing principles of class struggle, the French Revolution's legacy of egalitarianism and secularism. With regards to the issue of Alsace-Lorraine, it rejected the Communists and Autonomists' call for independence and favoured a form of regionalism in administrative and economic affairs. But unlike Francisme, it rejected the attribute of fascist and denied any link or allegiance to a foreign power or movement and used the triptych *Travail, Famille, Patrie* as its motto.³⁷⁹ Because its programme was so vague, it attracted people from many different horizons.³⁸⁰

In the Moselle, war veterans were not allowed initially to join the Croix de Feu because of their service in the German army during the Great War. By 1935, however, the ban was lifted and Mosellan veterans who had served as German soldiers were able to join the movement.³⁸¹ In May 1934, the membership of the *départemental* section of the Croix de Feu was roughly 400; by March 1936 it rose

³⁷⁵ AN, Rapport du préfet au directeur de la sûreté générale, Metz, 25 juillet 1935, F7/13038.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ APPP, Rapport sur les Croix de Feu, 10 juillet 1935, BA1901.

³⁷⁸ Robert Soucy, 'French Fascism and the Croix de Feu: A Dissenting Interpretation', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 26, 1991, pp.170-171.

³⁷⁹ The Croix de Feu (and its political heir the Parti Social Français) is at the centre of the ongoing debate on fascism in 1930s France. While some historians consider the movement fascist, others see it as an active form of conservative authoritarianism.

³⁸⁰ Albert Kéchichian, *Les Croix de Feu à l'Age des Fascismes: Travail, Famille, Patrie*, Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2006, p.367.

³⁸¹ Richard Millman, *La Question Juive entre les deux guerres, Liges de droite et antisémitisme en France*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1992, p.262.

to 12,000.³⁸² The *ligue* could rely on the support of the local notables such as business owners, the press, the Catholic clergy as well as politicians. The Croix de Feu's popularity was most noticeable in the urban and industrial cantons where its influence was further intensified by the support of management and large businesses. It would seem that the *préfet* himself was not indifférent to the Croix de Feu when he wrote in a report, '*dans les milieux ouvriers, à l'ardeur des convictions, vient s'ajouter les efforts de persuasion raisonnée du personnel dirigeant, dont un des membres est, invariablement, à la tête de la section [Croix de Feu] locale*'.³⁸³

The diocese, through Ritz, also supported the organisation and while the French National Assembly was debating the possible proscription of the *ligues* at the end of 1935, the local press and clergy rallied behind the Croix de Feu. The Sections Croix de Feu de la Lorraine, du pays de Bar et des Marches de l'Est even used a series of Ritz's articles from *Le Lorrain* as propaganda material in leaflets handed out during their meetings. The leaflets featured articles in which Ritz described the Croix de Feu as '*la saine opinion des forces saines, nationales ... et catholiques du pays*' and praised them as '*les opposants au ... front commun [qui] veulent la réconciliation de tous les Français*'.³⁸⁴ In return for his support, Ritz was described by the Croix de Feu as a true patriot and a true Lorrainer. During a private meeting held in Metz, before an audience of 3,000, Andrès, president of the Mosellan section, described Ritz's '*magnifiques pages consacrées au mouvement Croix de Feu*' as significant; the audience responded with cries of '*Vive l'abbé Ritz*'.³⁸⁵

Although de la Rocque repeatedly stated his movement's dissociation from the politics of the two blocs with his famous '*ni droite, ni gauche*' and '*nous ne sommes à personne, nous sommes les Croix de Feu*' statements, it appears that underneath its apolitical cover, de la Rocque's organisation often posed as the

³⁸² ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz au directeur de la sûreté générale, 27 mars 1936, 24Z17.

³⁸³ AN, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, 25 juillet 1935, F7/13038.

³⁸⁴ Croix de Feu de Metz, *op.cit.*, p.16

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

most vocal defenders of the right against the rising left.³⁸⁶ Just before the 1935 municipal elections, counting on the rising popularity of his movement, de la Rocque reminded candidates that they could not use their Croix de Feu credentials and in a document sent to all local Croix de Feu sections he wrote, '*il est défendu aux dirigeants des Croix de Feu ... de se porter candidat aux prochaines élections*'.³⁸⁷ Instead, the Croix de Feu were encouraged to '*former partout des commissions d'arbitrage choisissant ... les candidats d'intérêt public*'.³⁸⁸

Who did the Croix de Feu judge '*d'intérêt public*', or rather who did they not? At the top of their list of the *indésirables* came the PCF and the Popular Front. For the 1935 elections de la Rocque encouraged his followers to support any candidate who made it his priority to '*barrer la route au socialisme, au communisme et à [leurs] alliés, présents ou futurs*'.³⁸⁹ By early 1936, the national Croix de Feu were ready '*de se lancer dans la bataille dont ils peuvent être l'arbitre*' promising '*s'il le faut, au moment propice, pour lutter contre le front populaire et même au besoin, [de] s'emparer du pouvoir*' as a Croix de Feu businessman from Le Havre put it.³⁹⁰

After 6 February 1934, the Croix de Feu sought to win mass support and power by appealing to as large a population as possible. The *ligue* saw the void created by a chaotic right on the one side and an organised left on the other as a major avenue to power. Other minor *ligues* were present in the Moselle at the time, but none of them matched the membership or the magnetism of the Croix de Feu. Even the Front National, a coalition of the *ligues* initiated by the Solidarité Française in May 1934 and supported by the Action Française and the Jeunesses Patriotes, failed to attract the same numbers as the Croix de Feu. Incidentally, both Francisme and the Croix de Feu refused to join the Front National, an

³⁸⁶ CHSPO, de la Rocque papers, 'Recommandations aux Croix de Feu', nd, LR50.

³⁸⁷ CHSPO, de la Rocque papers, 'Circulaire préparatoire à la période des élections municipales, Paris, 14 mars 1935', LR76.

³⁸⁸ CHSPO, de la Rocque papers, 'Note confidentielle', Paris, 10 janvier 1935, LR53.

³⁸⁹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 9 avril 1934, 98AL683.

³⁹⁰ APPP, Rapport du ministre de l'Intérieur au préfet de police de Paris, Paris, 28 janvier 1936, BA1901.

organisation which, according to the *préfet* of the Moselle was '*d'une cohésion fort douteuse*',³⁹¹

It is clear that the *ligues*' common aversion to parliamentary democracy and attraction to authoritarianism did not suffice to overcome their divergences, and just like the parliamentary right, from which they had won many new supporters, they struggled to unite their forces in joint action. In early 1936 they faced an uncertain future after the National Assembly introduced a law banning paramilitary groups, and they counted on a defeat of the left at the next legislative elections.³⁹² Since the Popular Front promised the suppression of the *ligues* in its programme, their own survival depended on a victory of the right. Hence de la Rocque promised to support any candidate who, in his own words, would work on '*l'élimination des influences socialistes, communistes et alliées*' at the next elections.³⁹³ Did his efforts prove effective? At the national level, the answer is no, since the right lost the elections but in the Moselle, events took a rather different turn as the right won the elections; as the next chapter shall demonstrate, the Croix de Feu played a significant part in it. The election results, however, should not have come as a surprise since on the eve of the elections the local left and the PCF in particular were still disunited and embroiled in internal crises. In response to the Croix de Feu's growing popularity among the Mosellan population, the *préfet* reported '*le manque de réaction des milieux d'extrême gauche*'.³⁹⁴ Where were the PCF and the Popular Front if not fighting those they called '*les ligueurs fascistes*'? According to the *préfet*, the PCF '*s'emploie activement à reconstituer ses cadres et à réorganiser ses formations*'.³⁹⁵

³⁹¹ AN, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 24 novembre 1935, F7/13038.

³⁹² A bill enacted on 10 January 1936 gave the government the power to ban any movement whose organisation resembled that of a paramilitary group or militia. On 11 January, Bucard consequently dismantled his organisation and, the next day, created the Parti Franciste.

³⁹³ CHSPO, de la Rocque papers, 'Circulaire préparatoire à la période des élections municipales', Paris, 14 mars 1935, LR76.

³⁹⁴ AN, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, 24 novembre 1935, F7/13038.

³⁹⁵ AN, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, 24 décembre 1935, F7/13038.

Conclusion

Thus while 6 February was a Parisian event that belonged to the right, 12 February was a nation-wide event that demonstrated the readiness of the left's rank and file to unite against the fascist threat. After the SFIO and the PCF signed the pact of unity in July 1934, events moved swiftly for the Popular Front nationally. In January 1936, the coalition had a common programme and could rely on the support of the newly-unified CGT. In the Moselle, local activists' joint actions against the *ligues* predated the union of the left nationally. After '*l'unité à tout prix*' became the PCF's official doctrine in June 1934, the local Popular Front slowly came together under the leadership of the Communists.

The formation of the Popular Front in the Moselle encountered a very singular fate because of the particular context in which it took place. Firstly, the coalition was not tripartite but dual. The Radical-Socialists, the party of the middle-classes and one of the three major political forces behind the left-wing coalition, was quasi-inexistent in the Moselle. In the Sarreguemines area, where the Radicals tried to enter the coalition, they were reported to be too few to have any say in the common front committees. And at the 1936 elections, they were able to present a single candidate in the whole *département*, Gabriel Wagner in Metz.³⁹⁶ Relations between the other two parties were far from harmonious. The Socialists feared a Communist takeover, which resulted in only nominal participation. The only distinct success of the SFIO in the *département* was in Sarreguemines where the charismatic leader of the section, Nicolas Nicklaus, became mayor in May 1935 thanks to the strategy of the common front.³⁹⁷ As for the Communists, they were the unchallenged leaders of the coalition, and as such devised its strategy. But the fact that the coalition's driving force faced internal crises and restructuring at the same time gravely weakened the Popular Front from the onset.

³⁹⁶ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au directeur de la sûreté générale, 3 mai 1934, F7/13038.

³⁹⁷ The Communists urged their voters to vote for Nicklaus at the second round of the elections. At the cantonal elections of October 1934, the common front committee of Sarreguemines agreed to present a single candidate under the banner '*Für den Frieden*', (for peace). The candidate was a Communist.

Nonetheless, it might be said that in view of the left's long history of difficulties and failures in the region, local left wingers and the Communists in particular demonstrated dynamism and resourcefulness by creating a *départemental* committee. Local Communists also demonstrated their loyalty to the party's new line by welcoming the renegades Béron and Doeblé into the coalition after years of a turbulent relationship with the PCF's Central Committee; even if in private local party leaders still considered them enemies of the party. In February 1936, following the eighth party congress in Villeurbanne, the Mosellan PCF announced the creation of the Popular Front for the elections of May 1936. The strategy was clear: each party within the left-wing coalition was to present its own candidates at the first round of the elections and support the Popular Front candidates most likely to win at the second round. Marcel Cachin, freshly elected senator for the PCF, announced at Villeurbanne, *'je dis aujourd'hui que le parti a un tel rayonnement, un tel prestige que l'échec de toutes les autres formations politiques françaises est très net'*.³⁹⁸ The Communist party did indeed win many new seats at the National Assembly, but for the Mosellan federation *'l'échec de toutes les autres formations politiques'* proved to be wishful thinking. Once again, the right won a large majority of the seats, and the Mosellan Popular Front secured only one seat at the Palais Bourbon; that of the renegade Béron.

³⁹⁸ ADSSD, 'Rapport du 8ème Congrès du Parti Communiste, Villeurbanne, 22 janvier 1936, 1ère séance', 3Mi6/119 séquence 751.

Chapter Three - Elections, Strikes and *l'affaire d'Alsace-Lorraine*, April 1936 - October 1936

Introduction

Amidst growing international tensions and domestic confrontation between the radicalised right and the newly united left, the French political class as a whole was far from enthusiastic about the legislative elections scheduled for late April 1936.³⁹⁹ Nonetheless, with the PCF eager to attract electoral support across the social and political spectrum, the campaign gathered pace in the weeks preceding the first round of the elections. The Popular Front, formed by the PCF, SFIO and Radical-Socialist Party, narrowly won the election. But almost immediately after the election results were announced, and before the Popular Front could form a government, an unprecedented social explosion occurred when millions of workers went on strike. Although the government helped settle the conflict between the *patronat* and the workers, the scale of the strikes and the workers' new political and social consciousness alarmed many conservatives.

In the Moselle, events took a similar turn. Despite the right's overwhelming victory in the election, the strike movement that hit the region led to an enormous increase in CGT membership as well as the birth of a new political and social militancy among workers. Thus, in October, just when the old social order appeared threatened - something many right wingers feared - the PCF launched a vigorous propaganda campaign in the Moselle. By examining events at the national level and in the Moselle, this chapter will seek to answer three main questions. Firstly, what did the election campaign and results reveal about the current political atmosphere? Secondly, how did the hitherto largely apolitical

³⁹⁹ Three major international events occurred in 1935: the Saarland unanimously voted for its reunification with Germany in January, France signed a treaty of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union in May and Italy invaded Abyssinia in October. In March 1936, disregarding the Locarno treaty, Hitler's troops remilitarised the Rhineland. At the domestic level, the *ligues* intensified their anti-Communist campaigns and, on 13 February 1936, members of Action Française, who had gathered on the boulevard Saint-Germain in Paris to attend the funeral of Royalist historian Jacques Bainville, assaulted Blum. He convalesced for several weeks after the assault.

Mosellan industrial masses respond to the strike movement? Finally, what were the consequences of the PCF's campaign in the region?

In order to answer these questions, the first part of this chapter will examine the election at the national level and the local levels. Following the same model, the second part will examine the causes and effects of the social explosion that accompanied Blum's appointment as head of the Popular Front government and the subsequent Communist campaign in the Moselle.

Part One: the May 1936 Elections

At the national level, the 1936 elections produced remarkably little interest among the French electorate. *The Times'* Paris correspondent described the apathy as 'greater than at any French election within memory.'⁴⁰⁰ The elections took place under the uninominal system where only the candidates who obtained an absolute majority of votes in the first round were elected. Failing that, a second round was held a week later in the remaining constituencies between the two leading candidates. The electoral campaign, which began officially on 6 April, three weeks before the first round, was fought between two conflicting blocs: the centre-left Popular Front coalition and the right-wing anti-Popular Front bloc made up of all the parties and *ligues* united by a common fear and loathing of Communism. As the historian Jean-Michel Gaillard rightly notes, '*La France était coupée en deux lorsque vint le moment d'aller aux urnes, le 26 avril.*'⁴⁰¹ This does not mean, however, that the two blocs entered the electoral race in a disciplined manner.

On the left, the Radical, Socialist and Communist parties published a common programme which stipulated that they would enter the first round separately and with their own programmes, but would not stand against each other if a second round was required.⁴⁰² The Radicals, fearing a reaction of their

⁴⁰⁰ 'France Polls To-morrow', *The Times*, 25 April 1936, p.12.

⁴⁰¹ Jean-Michel Gaillard, *Les 40 Jours de Blum*, Paris: Perrin, 2001, p.22.

⁴⁰² The programme, whose slogan was '*Pain, Paix, Liberté*', comprised broad political and economic demands such as the dissolution of the *ligues*, the reduction of the working week without loss of earnings and defence of peace. For the full programme, see Blum, *L'Œuvre 1934-1937*, pp.227-229. The recently reunified CGT also formally adhered to the programme.

followers against the party's collusion with the PCF within the coalition, spoke very little of the Popular Front during the campaign. At a party meeting, Daladier referred to it as a reunion '*des grands partis de démocratie*' and declared, '*le Rassemblement populaire n'est pas un super parti. Il n'est pas davantage une organisation électorale.*'⁴⁰³ He then affirmed, '*Nous devons être résolus à affirmer partout, au premier tour de scrutin, la doctrine, le programme de notre parti.*' Thus, he confirmed, candidates would enter the first round of the elections under the Radical banner. Similarly, the SFIO also differentiated its own programme from that of the Popular Front. Just before the first round of the elections it issued a *Projet de Programme*, which stated,

*Le Parti Socialiste a participé de plein cœur aux travaux du comité de Rassemblement Populaire.... Le Parti Socialiste fera donc de son adhésion au programme du Front Populaire la règle de ses désistements du second tour. Mais c'est le programme du Parti Socialiste que les candidats socialistes exposeront et défendront devant les électeurs ... au premier tour de scrutin.*⁴⁰⁴

Determined to gather as many votes as possible, the PCF was by far the most committed and consistent advocate of supporting the Popular Front. According to a police report, '*M. Thorez a surpris par sa modération*' during the electoral campaign, and during a speech he gave on Radio-Paris on 17 April Thorez presented the PCF as the creator of the Popular Front and called for the reconciliation of the French people.⁴⁰⁵ He made a special effort to attract some of the right's traditional supporters such as the Catholic masses and war veterans, even those who in their hundreds of thousands had joined the *ligues*. To the Catholics, he said: '*Nous te tendons la main, catholique ... parce que tu es notre frère*', and to the *ligueurs*: '*Nous te tendons la main ... ancien combattant devenu Croix de Feu, parce que tu ... souffres comme nous du désordre et de la corruption*'. The Communists reflected this move in their leaflets, which they

⁴⁰³ AN, Daladier papers, 'Discours prononcé par Edouard Daladier à la séance plénière du Comité Exécutif du 18 mars 1936', 496AP6.

⁴⁰⁴ AN, Blum papers, 'Projet de programme du Parti Socialiste pour les élections législatives de 1936', nd, 570AP12.

⁴⁰⁵ AN, Rapport 'Sur la stratégie électorale de la gauche pour les élections de 1936' 29 avril 1936, F7/13983.

distributed in their millions and in which they vowed to defend the interests of the working and the middle classes. Although they also promised to end the monopoly of the *200 familles* and the diktat of the Comité des Forges, they deliberately abandoned their traditional references to anti-capitalism and internationalism and reiterated their party's adhesion to the common programme.⁴⁰⁶

On the right, because of internal dissensions and hostility between the leaders of the Fédération Républicaine, the Alliance Démocratique and the Parti Démocrate Populaire, there was no agreement on a common platform nor an electoral coalition. By and large right-wing candidates ran on platforms devoted to anti-Marxist diatribes. While Flandin's Alliance Démocratique described the Popular Front as '*une monstrueuse coalition électorale incapable d'assurer une majorité de gouvernement homogène*',⁴⁰⁷ Marin, leader of the Fédération Républicaine, affirmed in a radio speech, '*une majorité de Front Populaire le 26 avril serait ... la catastrophe financière, la ruine économique, l'émeute dans la rue, l'anarchie mortelle pour la France*'.⁴⁰⁸ As for the Parti Démocrate Populaire, although its campaign was not as fiercely anti-Popular Front as those of the Alliance Démocratique or the Fédération Républicaine, the historian Jean-Claude Delbreil writes that '*l'aspect d'élection "anti Front Populaire" a été fondamental*'.⁴⁰⁹ According to *The Times*, the right's strategy was risky since it was 'apt to fall on deaf ears at a time when the Franco-Soviet pact is felt to be ... one safeguard for the future.'⁴¹⁰

Even before the first round results were announced in the evening of 26 April, many contemporary observers had predicted a victory of the left, albeit a

⁴⁰⁶ The expression '*200 familles*', which Daladier used during a 1934 speech and which epitomised the mystique of the Popular Front, referred to the Banque de France's largest shareholders, who were believed to control the bank and France's monetary policy. Daladier first used the expression in the following manner, '*C'est ainsi que ... dans un pays de démocratie individualiste, ce sont 200 familles qui ... sont devenues les maîtresses indiscutables, non seulement de l'économie française, mais de la politique française elle-même.*' AN, Daladier papers, 'Discours prononcé au Congrès de Nantes du 27 octobre 34', 496AP6.

⁴⁰⁷ Jean Grandmougin, *Histoire Vivante du Front Populaire*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1966, p.163.

⁴⁰⁸ AN, Marin papers, Communiqué de presse, 'Discours radio-diffusé de Louis Marin le 23 avril 1936', 317AP86.

⁴⁰⁹ Delbreil, *op.cit.*, p.313.

⁴¹⁰ 'The French Elections', *The Times*, 14 April 1936, p.11.

marginal one. *The Times* of 25 April affirmed, 'it is ... expected that the Left will come back to Parliament somewhat stronger than they left it and that the Communists (who had only 20 members of all shades in the late Chamber) will at least double their strength.'⁴¹¹ The day after the elections *Le Temps's* headline read, '*la première impression, après les élections d'hier ... est évidemment celle d'une poussée communiste.*'⁴¹² But of the 618 seats contested, only 185 were won at the first ballot, leaving 433 to be decided in the second round. Although the candidates of the left - and the PCF in particular - who were still in the running had obtained promising results, a victory of the Popular Front still required the three parties to be loyal to the strategy of the *désistement au second tour* in order to emerge victorious on Sunday 3 May.

At national headquarters level, party leaders reiterated their support for the Popular Front. A police report explained that despite a few points of contention on subjects such as devaluation and foreign policy, '*les communistes et les socialistes se montrent résolus à appliquer la discipline du Front Populaire au second tour.*'⁴¹³ Another report described how '*l'accord entre les communistes et les radicaux est parfait.*'⁴¹⁴ The three parties' statements issued shortly after 26 April echoed those affirmations. The PCF and the SFIO joint declaration read, '*Les candidats des deux partis devront se désister mutuellement pour ceux d'entre eux que le suffrage universel a placés en tête pour battre la réaction.*'⁴¹⁵ The Radicals' statement issued on 28 April similarly stipulated,

*Partout où les suffrages des électeurs de gauche se sont divisés sur les noms de plusieurs candidats se réclamant du Rassemblement Populaire, ils devront, au second tour, faire bloc sur celui de ces candidats que le suffrage universel a mis en tête au premier tour.*⁴¹⁶

⁴¹¹ 'France Polls To-morrow', *The Times*, 25 April 1936, p.12.

⁴¹² 'La Poussée Communiste', *Le Temps*, 28 avril 1936, p.1.

⁴¹³ Unlike the Communists, the Socialists and the Radical-Socialists favoured an economic policy of devaluation and a diplomatic issue in case of a conflict with Germany. AN, Rapport 'Sur la stratégie électorale de la gauche aux élections de 1936', 29 avril 1936, F7/13983.

⁴¹⁴ AN, Rapport 'Sur la stratégie électorale de la gauche aux élections de 1936', 30 avril 1936, F7/13983.

⁴¹⁵ AN, Thorez papers, 'Lettre à la presse de Paris', 28 avril 1936, 626AP149.

⁴¹⁶ CHSPO, Genebrier papers, 'Déclaration du Comité Exécutif du parti Radical', Paris, 28 avril 1936, GE5.

As for the right, it maintained its anti-Popular Front stance into the second round, and in an alarmingly ominous letter to party members, Jean Guiter, secretary-general of the Fédération Républicaine, wrote,

*Si le Front Populaire l'emporte, dimanche, au deuxième tour, ce sera, ET DANS TOUS LES DOMAINES, le signal de la catastrophe dont nul ne peut prévoir l'étendue. La France, n'en doutez pas, risque d'avoir le sort de l'Espagne.... Et vous savez que la guerre civile c'est, en même temps, la GUERRE tout court.*⁴¹⁷

Were all elements of the left loyal to the Popular Front strategy? Judging by the second-round election results, the electoral discipline seemed to prove rather efficient. Even if a few Radical candidates refused to ally with other Popular Front candidates in their constituency because of hostility towards the PCF, by and large the tactic stood its test since the Popular Front emerged victorious with a majority of 381 seats versus 237 for the right. Nevertheless, despite the left's vigorous campaign between the two rounds and the remarkably high turnout (82 percent of the electorate), the results did not mark the clear shift to the left that many had anticipated.⁴¹⁸

Compared to the 1932 legislature, the left gained roughly 400,000 votes while the right lost 180,000; a difference of only 220,000.⁴¹⁹ As noted by many observers, the most significant outcome of the elections was the shift *within* the left. While the Radicals lost over 400,000 votes and the SFIO 10,000, the Communists more than doubled their 1932 results with more than 700,000 new votes. In terms of seats, the PCF gained 72 seats, 61 more than in 1932, the Socialists gained 131, down 16 from 1932, and the Radicals gained 106, down 51 from 1932. There was thus a shift away from the centre and towards the extreme left. Nonetheless, the SFIO remained the largest political party within the coalition, and on 4 May Blum announced that he would lead the new government. As he wrote in *Le Populaire*,

⁴¹⁷ AN, Marin papers, 'Lettre aux membres du parti', Paris, 27 avril 1936, 317AP72.

⁴¹⁸ Lachapelle, *Elections Législatives 1936*, p.IX. The 1932 elections drew a similarly high rate of voters (81 percent).

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

*Le parti socialiste revendique dans l'action commune la responsabilité et la part qui lui reviennent.... Nous tenons donc à déclarer ... que nous sommes prêts à remplir le rôle qui nous appartient, c'est-à-dire à constituer et diriger le gouvernement de Front Populaire.*⁴²⁰

The right's results indicated a similar polarisation of its electorate. While the nationalistic Fédération Républicaine gained 350,000 votes, the moderate Parti Démocrate Populaire and the Alliance Démocratique lost 520,000. A few weeks after the elections, Charles Des Isnards, a Fédération Républicaine deputy for Paris, blamed the right's internal dissensions and its lack of socio-economic programme for its defeat: '*Nous n'avons pas su ou pas pu faire taire certaines rivalités et les ambitions personnelles*'.⁴²¹ His appeal to the right against the new majority and Blum, whom he described as '*le métèque [qui] va diriger un pays essentiellement catholique*' was: '*Groupons nous! Que ces elections nous servent de leçon*'.⁴²²

It is worth noting that political leaders such as Marin promptly realised that, without the support of the 106 Radical deputies, the number of PCF and SFIO deputies barely exceeded those of the opposition, thus giving the right a chance to regain office. This explains why Marin called for a meeting of all opposition parties on 15 May 1936 in order to coordinate their attitude towards the new Chamber and the Radicals in particular. As a police report put it, he also asked the right-wing press to '*abandonner ou modérer leurs attaques contre les chefs du parti radical*', since he believed '*après l'échec attendu du gouvernement de Front Populaire pouvoir tenter vers la fin de l'année la formation d'un cabinet de concentration dans lequel les modérés [ndlr, the right] collaboreraient avec les radicaux*'.⁴²³ The meeting never took place.

Flandin, eager to lead his own centre-right coalition against the Popular Front, announced that his party would not take part in such a project. Instead, according to a police informer, he held separate talks with leaders of the centre-

⁴²⁰ Blum, *L'Œuvre 1934-1937*, p.255.

⁴²¹ AN, 'Rapport sur le Parti National Populaire', Paris, 19 mai 1936, F7/13983.

⁴²² *Ibid.*

⁴²³ AN, 'Rapport sur l'opposition', Paris, 15 mai 1936, F7/13983.

right in order to '*réaliser une formation centriste dont il serait le chef et qui pourrait avoir une mission d'arbitrage après la chute attendue dans quelques mois du gouvernement de Front Populaire.*'⁴²⁴ It appears that, just as before the elections, personal ambitions and internal battles prevailed over political judgement, thus highlighting the right's propensity to divisions. Would the right be able to overcome these obstacles in the future or, as noted in a police report, would history repeat itself? '*Sous la précédente Chambre il y eut aussi une proposition d'inter-groupe. Elle n'aboutit à rien.*'⁴²⁵

In the Moselle, just as at the national level, one of the main characteristics of the 1936 elections was the existence of a deep division between the left and right, with the left dominated by the Popular Front and the right comprising a loose association of politicians, *ligueurs* and the press who believed themselves confronting a common enemy, Communism. Alongside the traditional themes of anti-secularism, the protection of the Catholic Church and the *particularisme mosellan*, the right-wing forces focused their energies on depicting the PCF as a foreign agent whose ambition was to take France to war.⁴²⁶ In a pre-election edition, *Le Messin* urged its readers to '*voter Français*', claiming, '*Le Front populaire c'est la guerre!*'⁴²⁷ But in contrast with previous legislative elections, the situation of the right appeared more complicated, and the slow decline of the once-dominant Catholic right, represented by the Union Républicaine Démocratique/Union Républicaine Lorraine, seemed to be confirmed; at least during the legislative elections. Indeed, as mentioned in chapter Two, the results of the 1935 municipal elections clearly demonstrate the Catholic right's continuing domination in local elections; it won 93 percent of the cast votes.

While some candidates ran under the banner of the Union Républicaine Lorraine, others chose to do so under the auspices of the Fédération

⁴²⁴ AN, 'Rapport sur l'opposition', Paris, 16 mai 1936, F7/13983.

⁴²⁵ AN, 'Rapport sur la Fédération Républicaine', 26 mai 1936, F7/13983.

⁴²⁶ *Le Messin* launched a particularly fierce campaign against the Communist candidate for Metz 1, Anstett, accusing him of working as a secret agent for the Soviet Union and organising a war with Germany. It also vilified the Popular Front and urged undecided voters to vote for the parties '*de l'ordre et de la paix*'.

⁴²⁷ Ascomemo, Copie de *Le Messin*, 3 mai 1936, p.1, 20EDG.

Républicaine-backed Union Républicaine Démocratique only, thus leading to multiple candidacies in a few constituencies. Nowhere was this more evident than in Château-Salins and West Thionville where the Union Républicaine Lorraine and the Union Républicaine Démocratique, having failed to reach an electoral agreement, presented their own candidates: Liard against Génois in the first, and Thomas, the Union Républicaine Démocratique candidate financially backed by the de Wendel family, against the Union Républicaine Lorraine's Paté. In Sarrebourg, Emile Peter refused the sponsorship of any party and ran as an independent conservative, although he was an active member of the Croix de Feu. In Boulay, Alex Wiltzer abandoned the Union Républicaine Lorraine for the Alliance Démocratique, and in Forbach the clerical conservative new comer Paul Harter backed up by the Christlich-Soziale Partei and the Croix de Feu appeared from the outset as the electorate's favourite. In Boulay and Forbach, it is worth noting, the Christlich-Soziale Partei fielded respectively Antoni, the party leader, and Harter. Both were well-known locally and had the support of the local clergy and the Croix de Feu. Neither the Union Républicaine Démocratique nor the Union Républicaine Lorraine were represented in these constituencies.⁴²⁸

Did they agree on an electoral pact with the Christlich-Soziale Partei in those two areas? Although it has not been possible to find any evidence to support this claim, the fact that the two parties had previously come to such agreements makes it seem likely. Indeed a police report in 1934 noted that '*M. Antoni ... a exprimé l'espoir que l'[Union Républicaine Démocratique] respecterait la signature de ses dirigeants, et, restant fidèle à l'accord de 1932, [que] la question de la solidarité chrétienne*' would be maintained.⁴²⁹ As for Robert Schuman, he refused the sponsorship of the nationalistic Union Républicaine Démocratique and following his Catholic inclinations he entered the race under the twin Parti Démocrate Populaire and Union Républicaine Lorraine banners in East Thionville. Another interesting aspect of these elections was the introduction of the newly-

⁴²⁸ Jean El Gammal (dir.), *Dictionnaire des Parlementaires Lorrains de la Troisième République*, Metz: Editions Serpenoise, 2006, p.119.

⁴²⁹ AN, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au directeur de la sûreté nationale, 31 août, F7/13038.

created Franciste party represented by Etienne in East Thionville and Schmitt in West Thionville.

By and large the right appeared to be more divided than at the previous elections, what with the Union Républicaine Lorraine and the Union Républicaine Démocratique largely dominating the political arena since 1919. One should not assume, however, that this brought confusion among the Mosellan electorate, as all right-wing parties could rely on the support of the two conservative elements in Moselle politics: the press and the Catholic clergy. Besides, ideology and political preference were not always decisive in the electorate's choices in local elections, and the successful candidates were often prominent individuals drawn from the world of the notables, with whom the voters were familiar. Thus far, isolated from traditional French politics by linguistic, historical and cultural barriers, the Moselle almost perfectly exemplified this French provincial model.

Loyal to the PCF Central Committee's line, the Mosellan Communists set aside extreme demands and for the first time since 1919 abandoned their claim for the independence of Alsace-Lorraine. Their programme gave central place to moderation. As Anstett, the *départemental* federation's president, went so far as to declare at a pre-election meeting, '*il faut s'approcher des petits commerçants ... la situation actuelle des classes moyennes le permet*'.⁴³⁰ Using the party's enormous propaganda machine, they distributed thousands of leaflets and organised meetings in several towns and villages. They also fielded a candidate in each of the nine constituencies. The PCF, due to its leading position within the local left and its determination to steer the Popular Front, largely dictated the electoral campaign on the left.

The Socialists and the Radicals, who reluctantly agreed to support the left-wing coalition, succeeded in presenting candidates in only three constituencies out of the nine available: the SFIO in three – Metz 1, Sarrebourg and Sarreguemines—and the Radicals in one, in Metz 1.⁴³¹ Specific to the Moselle were the cases of the

⁴³⁰ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial gare centrale Metz, 24 février 1936, 301M78.

⁴³¹ ADM, Rapport du préfet, 'Liste définitive des candidatures déclarées, élections législatives 1936', nd, 303M58.

two Communist renegades Doeblé in Forbach and Béron in West Thionville. Both ran under the banner of Independent Socialists and supported the coalition. Remarkably, the Communists treated them with respect, going so far as to stand down in their favour when they emerged the strongest candidates. Breistroff, one of the early supporters of the Popular Front, ran as an Independent Socialist in East Thionville, stronghold of Schuman.

Interestingly enough, the left presented three candidates in Forbach. This means that outgoing deputy Doeblé, as well as facing a strong candidate from the right, supported by the clergy and the Croix de Feu, had to fight against another Independent Socialist and a Communist, thus reducing the left's chances to win in the first round. Although a *commissaire spécial* from Thionville reported that '*une propagande électorale va être entreprise sous l'égide d'un comité de liaison socialo-communiste*',⁴³² a few weeks before the elections began the *préfet* noted that '*aucune décision définitive n'a été prise ... en ce qui concerne l'union éventuelle au sein du front populaire*'.⁴³³ By the end of April, the Popular Front became a reality and, as at the national level, all parties entered the first round separately while agreeing to support one or another in the second round.

The elections, stimulated by the fierce campaign between the Communists and their opponents, brought out a larger proportion of Mosellan voters than the national average, as figures reveal that 85 percent participated on 26 April.⁴³⁴ The first round confirmed the strong position of the right, which won over 65 percent of the votes and secured four seats out of the nine available: Harter (Indépendant Conservateur) in Forbach, Sérot (Union Républicaine Démocratique) in Metz 2, Peter (Indépendant Conservateur) in Sarrebourg and Schuman (Union Républicaine Lorraine) in East Thionville; see tables and charts in appendix for more details. Because of its double candidacy in West Thionville, the parties of the Popular Front gained just over 30 percent of the vote, with the PCF alone receiving more than 55 percent of the left's votes and the Independent Socialists

⁴³² ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Thionville, 10 février 1936, 301M78.

⁴³³ ADM, Rapport du préfet au président du Conseil, Metz, 9 mars 1936, 301M78.

⁴³⁴ The total numbers of voters on 26 April was 139,759; ADM, Dépêche télégraphique, 26 avril 1936, 303M58.

35 percent. The results also confirmed the lack of support for the SFIO, which obtained only 1,471 votes or 4 percent of the left's votes, and the quasi-inexistence of the Radicals, which obtained only 200 votes, 0.5 percent of the left's votes. But with five seats to be decided in the second round, both sides had to review their tactics. The right, caught up in the crisis between the Union Républicaine Lorraine and Union Républicaine Démocratique candidates and the emergence of new parties, had to agree on which candidates to maintain at the second round. The Mosellan left, whose results were promising compared to the previous elections in 1932, had now to put its unity and tactics to the test.

In order to augment its chances of a victory against the Popular Front candidate Béron, the Union Républicaine Lorraine agreed to remove Paté and support Thomas in West Thionville. The failure of the right-wing parties to come to an agreement in the first round might have cost them the seat, as their candidates' combined total was only 7,822 votes against 6,695 for Béron.⁴³⁵ But such calculations are not to be trusted as it is impossible to say what the left's response would have been had the right agreed on a single candidate in the first round: Béron and the PCF, who received 1,659 votes, might also have agreed on a single candidacy to give the left a chance to win. Because the SFIO and the Radicals presented so few candidates in the *département*, the issue of withdrawal at the second round posed little problem to the coalition. In Metz 1 and Sarreguemines, the Radicals and Socialists, who obtained very poor results, withdrew their candidates for the Communists, and apart from West Thionville where the Communist candidate stepped down in favour of Béron, the party was able to maintain its candidates in the other two remaining constituencies, Boulay and Château-Salins.⁴³⁶

The election results on 3 May confirmed the dominant position of the right in the Moselle. Comparing the Popular Front's victory at the national level and that of the Catholic right locally, *Le Lorrain's* editorial read, '*C'est une vague rouge qui a déferlé sur notre pays, faisant le maximum de ravages dans la région parisienne*

⁴³⁵ Lachapelle, *Elections Législatives 1936*, p.170.

⁴³⁶ AN, Thorez papers, 'Liste des maintiens ou désistements des candidats PC', nd, 626AP149.

*et le midi. Heureusement l'Est ... [a] tenu le coup.*⁴³⁷ The right won all but one of the constituencies, winning Forbach from Doeblé and losing West Thionville to Béron and the Popular Front. The election also confirmed the decline of the moderate right, which won five out of the nine seats (Boulay, Metz 1, Metz 2, Sarreguemines and Thionville Est): it had won seven in 1932.⁴³⁸ It also confirmed the emergence of more extreme men and parties in Forbach, Château-Salins and Sarrebourg. The first was won by Paul Harter (Indépendant Conservateur), the second by François Beaudoin (Parti Agraire et Paysan Français) and the third by Emile Peter who left the Union Républicaine Lorraine to run as an Indépendant Conservateur officially and a Croix de Feu unofficially. As at the national level, the victory of the new right (in the case of the Moselle, the Croix de Feu and the Parti Agraire) illustrates the shift of the Mosellan electorate towards the extreme. This polarisation saw the introduction of parties and organisations, which, to some extent, brought national politics closer to home. Almost twenty years after reintegrating France, the Moselle was finally accepting organisations whose interests were not mainly linked to the *département*.

As for the PCF, a similar trend appeared, since although it was defeated in every seat it contested, it secured 3,302 more votes compared to 1932.⁴³⁹ The increase was particularly noticeable in the industrial areas around Thionville and Metz 1, where the PCF candidate came closer than ever to winning the seat thanks to the support of the Popular Front. But the additional votes proved insufficient and the results confirmed the left's poor performance in the region. At a party meeting in Metz on 17 May, a representative of the Central Committee declared, '*La jeunesse va aux Croix de Feu en masse, notamment en Moselle ... [où] la propagande et le travail des militants ont fait défaut.*'⁴⁴⁰ According to Thorez's calculations, of all France's industrial *départements*, but for the Loire-Inférieure and Belfort, the Moselle came bottom in terms of new Communist votes.

⁴³⁷ *Le Lorrain*, 4 mai 1936, p.1.

⁴³⁸ For full election results and an electoral map of the Moselle, see the appendices.

⁴³⁹ From 18,823 in 1932 to 22,045 in 1936; AN, Thorez papers, 'Classement par augmentation des voix sur 1932 des départements industriels', nd, 626AP149.

⁴⁴⁰ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz, 18 mai 1936, 301M78.

More telling perhaps was the 17 percent increase of votes: the lowest in all France's industrial *départements*; hardly a promising omen for the future of the Popular Front in the Moselle.⁴⁴¹

Part Two: A New Social and Political Order?

The Popular Front in office and the social explosion

According to the police, the majority of Socialist activists, expecting the Radicals to win, were very anxious at the thought of entering or leading the new government.⁴⁴² Always uneasy at the spectre of becoming the prisoner of non-Socialist right-leaning allies, they believed Blum should not lead the new government because of his age and ill-health. Instead they favoured a SFIO-backed Radical personality or Vincent Auriol, Socialist deputy for the Haute-Garonne. Notwithstanding these concerns, Blum claimed the leadership of the future government as soon as the composition of the new Chamber was made official. The day after the elections, he wrote in a special edition of *Le Populaire*,

*Le Parti Socialiste est devenu le groupe le plus puissant non seulement de la majorité, mais de la Chambre entière. Nous tenons donc à déclarer sans perdre une heure que nous sommes prêts à remplir le rôle qui nous appartient, c'est-à-dire à constituer et diriger le gouvernement de Front Populaire.*⁴⁴³

While the Radicals, as the second largest party in the Chamber, were willing to enter the coalition government, the Communists refused to do so. They agreed, however, to support it fully. As Jacques Duclos, the senior Communist official recently elected in the Seine *département*, wrote in *L'Humanité d'Alsace Lorraine*: '*le parti communiste soutiendra loyalement le gouvernement qui appliquera le programme du Front Populaire.*'⁴⁴⁴ On 6 June, Blum presented his

⁴⁴¹ 'Classement des départements industriels par augmentation des voix sur 1932', *Les Cahiers du Bolchévisme*, No 8-9, 15 mai 1936, p. 515.

⁴⁴² AN, Rapport de police 'Au sujet des Socialistes et des résultats des élections', 6 mai 1936, F7/13983.

⁴⁴³ *Le Populaire*, 4 mai 1936, p.1.

⁴⁴⁴ Duclos, *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine*, 12 mai 1936, p.1.

new government, composed of eighteen Socialists, four Independent Socialists and thirteen Radicals, which the Chamber approved by 384 votes to 210. In a radio speech, he promised to enact promptly the Popular Front's programme and to present the deputies with bills on forty-hour week, collective contracts and paid holidays before Parliament's summer break.⁴⁴⁵

In Paris, the celebration of the victory of the Popular Front took place on 14 July. After originally opting for 14 June, the Parisian committee of the *Rassemblement Populaire* – the body overseeing the activities of the Popular Front - settled for 14 July. The date was highly symbolic as it commemorated not only the fall of the Bastille in 1789, but also the 14 July gathering that completed the formation of the Popular Front the previous year.⁴⁴⁶ Under the influence of the local Communist party, the Mosellan committee of the *Rassemblement Populaire* decided to celebrate the national electoral victory on 14 June. As a result, tens of thousands celebrated across the *département*, principally in the industrial areas. According to the *Metzer Freies Journal*, 5,000 demonstrators gathered in Forbach, 10,000 in the Fensch valley and 10,000 in the Orne valley.⁴⁴⁷ In Sarreguemines, the police reported 4,000 demonstrators who, calmly, with their right fists clenched, carried the red flag and the *tricolore* over the Saar river towards the German border.⁴⁴⁸ In Metz, 5,000 men, women and children paraded through the streets, carrying banners that read '*Pain, Paix, Liberté*' and '*Die Reichen sollen zahlen*' (the rich must pay), to the sound of a brass band playing the *Marseillaise* and the *Internationale*. The *Metzer Freies Journal* claimed that it was the first time since the armistice of 1918 that Metz had experienced such a big demonstration and that the number of demonstrators largely exceeded the organisers' most optimistic predictions.

⁴⁴⁵ AN, Blum papers, 'Notes de l'appel radiodiffusé le 5 juin 1936', 570AP12.

⁴⁴⁶ Another important celebration to the Parisian left was the Mur des Fédérés demonstration on 24 May which commemorated the fall of the last Communards in May 1871. According to Marcel Gibelin and Jacques Danos, the demonstration gathered 600,000 people in 1936; in Danos and Gibelin, *Juin 36*, Paris: La Découverte, 1986, p.41.

⁴⁴⁷ 'Die Massenkundgebungen vom Sonntag!', *Metzer Freies Journal*, 16 Juni 1936, p.1.

⁴⁴⁸ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au sous-préfet, 20 juin 1936, 26Z3.

The *départemental* committee of the *Rassemblement Populaire* celebrated Béron's victory against the de Wendel-backed candidate Thomas in West-Thionville. At a committee meeting, Schwob, the CGT's deputy leader, declared, '*Le comité départemental réuni le 10 mai salue avec enthousiasme le succès du Front Populaire lors des récentes élections législatives*'.⁴⁴⁹ Eager to see the coalition's programme implemented without delay, he then affirmed that '*le Front Populaire de la Moselle interprète le silence ... du Rassemblement Populaire sur la question d'Alsace-Lorraine comme une nouvelle affirmation ... d'assurer immédiatement l'assimilation totale des provinces recouvrées*' and called for '*une réalisation rapide et complète de la charte du Front Populaire national*'.⁴⁵⁰ But even before Blum became *président du Conseil* and had a chance to present his projects to the Chamber, a large wave of strikes with factory occupations swept across the country including the Moselle.

The first signs of social protest, predating the elections, appeared in Paris soon after the reunification of the CGT in March 1936. The Parisian police reported that '*l'unité syndicale retrouvée ... [a redoublé] la confiance des militants du mouvement ouvrier, les incitant à revendiquer plus vigoureusement*'.⁴⁵¹ The wave of factory occupations began in May and continued after Blum took office on 5 June. With almost two million workers involved, almost all areas of industry were affected. In face of the government's refusal to evacuate the factories by force, the Confédération Générale de la Production Française, which represented mainly large businesses, had little choice but to negotiate with the CGT at the Hôtel Matignon - Blum's official residence in Paris – in the presence of the *président du Conseil*.⁴⁵²

On 7 June, after one afternoon of negotiations, the *patronat* accepted the union's demands and signed an agreement referred to as the 'Accords de

⁴⁴⁹ ADSSD, Rapport 'Trois résolutions émanant de l'union des syndicats des ouvriers métallurgie de la Moselle, Front Populaire départemental de la Moselle', signé Schwob, Thionville, 19 mai 1936, 3Mi6/125 seq 796a.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵¹ AN, Rapport de police, 29 avril 1936, F7/13983.

⁴⁵² The Confédération générale de la production française was renamed Confédération générale du patronat français in August 1936.

Matignon'. The 'Accords' comprised seven articles which promised the introduction of collective work contracts, acknowledged the workers' rights to join or form a trade union, granted pay increases of up to 15 percent, guaranteed the absence of penalties for strike action, and affirmed right to elect union representatives in firms whose workforce exceeded ten people.⁴⁵³ As agreed during the negotiations, the government introduced legislation on the paid holidays and the forty-hour week without loss of pay a few days later. But despite the unprecedented benefits granted to workers, the strikes continued. As a police report stated,

*D'une manière générale ... les ouvriers sont mécontents de l'accord.... Nombreux sont les intéressés qui estiment que même en bénéficiant des dispositions les plus favorables ... ils auront encore des salaires nettement insuffisants.*⁴⁵⁴

The agreement thus failed to contain the movement and the CGT leaders quickly realised, as the same report added, that *'ils vont avoir de sérieuses difficultés pour faire reprendre le travail aux grévistes.'*

Many contemporaries believed that the movement had become uncontrollable and that the CGT officials were losing control of its troops. It was not until Thorez, whose party had hitherto seemed equally unable to contain the movement, intervened and declared on 11 June, *'il faut savoir terminer une grève dès que satisfaction a été obtenue'*, that the movement began to lose momentum.⁴⁵⁵ Blum's energetic declarations in the Chamber and his introduction of paid holidays on the same day doubtless contributed to the movement's decline.

According to Blum, the *patronat* bore a heavy responsibility for the strike movement. Regarding the strikes in the steelworks, he blamed *'le refus prolongé par les organisations patronales chaque fois qu'un contact leur a été demandé par les organisations ouvrières.'*⁴⁵⁶ He also believed the movement to be a natural progression of the victory of the Popular Front as he affirmed in the Chamber, *'Le mouvement revendicatif ... a reçu, au lendemain des élections, une impulsion*

⁴⁵³ AN, Blum papers, Note manuscrite 'Accords Matignon', 7 juin 1936, 570AP13.

⁴⁵⁴ APPP, Rapport 'Au sujet du mouvement de grève', 9 juin 1936, BA2340.

⁴⁵⁵ APPP, Rapport 'Au sujet du mouvement de grève', 13 juin 1936, BA1874.

⁴⁵⁶ AN, Blum papers, 'Réponse de Léon Blum aux interpellations, Chambre des Députés, 6 juin 1936', 570AP12.

sensible. Il était naturel.⁴⁵⁷ Regardless of who was responsible for the impulse behind the movement, it is evident from the thousands of photographs of these events, that many workers felt, as Kedward puts it, 'a triumph over established social and political hierarchies.'⁴⁵⁸ This gave the workforce such confidence, and sometimes arrogance, that in some workplaces, as a police report stated, '*c'est la cellule [communiste] qui dicte ... ses volontés ... au syndicat et même à la direction de l'établissement*'.⁴⁵⁹ By forcing the *patronat* to accept their demands, the strikers modified the existing social order. The question was, how long would these changes last before the *patronat* and the right-wing political forces reacted?

Among the latter, the initial reactions to the strike movement were mixed though generally subdued. The Christian Parti Démocrate Populaire, while professing sympathy for the worker's demands, condemned '*les intolérables atteintes portées à la liberté des personnes et à la propriété par les occupations*', and '*la trop longue inertie du gouvernement devant le désordre social*'.⁴⁶⁰ The Catholics were divided with on one extreme the Catholic right, supported by the Pope and Castelnau's Fédération Nationale Catholique, and on the other Christian Communists of Terre Nouvelle.⁴⁶¹ The former condemned the Communists and their influence on the working classes because of what the Vatican's newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* described as '*l'accommodement [impossible] entre la vérité de notre sainte religion et cette négation de tous les droits humains et divins qu'on trouve dans le communisme*'.⁴⁶² The latter, on the other hand, praised the strikers by arguing that the movement was '*un mouvement de masses, instinctif et spontané*', which sprang from '*trop de misères, de souffrances dans la classe ouvrière*'.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁸ Kedward, *op.cit.*, p.184.

⁴⁵⁹ APPP, Rapport 'Au sujet du mouvement de grève', 18 juin 1936, BA1874.

⁴⁶⁰ AN, Marin papers, 'Motion adoptée par le Congrès National du PDP à Arras', 15 novembre 1936, 317AP84.

⁴⁶¹ APPP, Rapport de police, 15 mai 1936, BA1853.

⁴⁶² Maurice Laudrain, 'Pie XII et le Bolchévisme', *Terre Nouvelle*, 14 juillet 1936, p.15.

⁴⁶³ Marcel Dupont, 'Réflexions sur les grèves', *Terre Nouvelle*, 14 juillet 1936, p.2.

The Fédération Républicaine formally warned the government of '*les conséquences extrêmement graves que peuvent avoir ... [les] occupations ... d'usines et l'agitation révolutionnaire*' and praised '*les chefs d'industrie qui ... ont refusé de discuter, tant que leurs usines seraient occupées, avec des meneurs révolutionnaires*'.⁴⁶⁴ On the whole, however, the right appears to have temporarily been cowed by the scale of the strike movement, for it generally displayed benevolence to the strikers. As Samuel Osgood writes, 'the right, and especially the extreme right, made a great show of its concern for the social problem and of its sympathies with the aspirations of the working class.'⁴⁶⁵

Indeed, the *ligues* supported the workers' grievances, while asserting that the strikers had made the wrong choice by voting for the Popular Front. As the weekly *Le Franciste* put it, '*Le peuple de France a eu raison de se dresser contre les fléaux qui l'écrasent. Mais il s'est trompé sur le choix de ses nouveaux maîtres*'.⁴⁶⁶ As for the Croix de Feu, it condemned what its manifesto described as '*un faux aspect de revendications légitimes*' which would have disastrous consequences on '*les lendemains de l'économie nationale, pour la main d'œuvre, pour la famille, pour la paix*'.⁴⁶⁷ Keen to reassure the *patronat* and use the workers' discontent to his advantage, de la Rocque announced the creation of *Syndicats professionnels*. He explained their aims in the *ligue's* paper *Le Flambeau*:

*Dès à présent nos amis doivent [se] substituer aux plateformes révolutionnaires des Internationales.... Organisons-nous partout pour dégager notre doctrine: charte du travail minimum, le salaire tenant compte des charges de famille, association du travailleur fidèle au sort de son entreprise.... Nos camarades formeront dans chaque usine ... des syndicats locaux inspirés de ces principes.*⁴⁶⁸

One event of particular importance to this study was the decree that banned the *ligues* on 23 June 1936. Their dissolution had been a priority of the common programme, but while this put an end to their paramilitary organisations, it could

⁴⁶⁴ AN, Marin papers, 'Communiqué de la Fédération Républicaine', 16 septembre 1936, 317AP84.

⁴⁶⁵ Samuel M. Osgood, 'The Front Populaire: Views from the Right', *International Review of Social History*, 9, 2, 1964, p.195.

⁴⁶⁶ APPP, Rapport 'Transmission du journal "Le Franciste"', 10 juillet 1936, BA1907.

⁴⁶⁷ CHSPO, La Rocque papers, 'Un manifeste Croix de Feu', Paris, 16 juin 1936, LR57.

⁴⁶⁸ CHSPO, La Rocque papers, Extrait de *Le Flambeau*, 4 juin 1936, LR57.

not prevent them from re-organising into parties and re-entering the political system. While La Rocque's Croix de Feu became the Parti Social Français, the ex-Communist Jacques Doriot created the Parti Populaire Français.⁴⁶⁹ The latter gathered mainly ex-Communists loyal to Doriot and disenchanted *ex-ligueurs*. Its manifesto, whose ultimate aim was to '*refaire la France*', vowed to eliminate the PCF and the Popular Front and to fight against the free masons and the Jews.⁴⁷⁰ As will be seen, both parties would play decisive roles in the transformation of the political right at the national level and in the Moselle.

Even before the strike movement began in the Moselle in mid-June 1936, the first social repercussions of the Popular Front's victory occurred when the coal mining management and trade unions representatives agreed on a convention on 12 May. Based on a similar agreement signed in the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais in April, it guaranteed workers' pay increases.⁴⁷¹ But the miners, protesting that the increases were lower than those granted to their counterparts in the northern *départements*, rejected the convention. One month later, as the Mosellan *patronat* reluctantly agreed to the terms of the Matignon agreement, the trade unions representatives and mine managers signed a second convention.⁴⁷² Once again the miners rejected it and, encouraged by the national movement and the *départementale* celebrations of the victory of the Popular Front of 14 June, they called for a strike on 16 June. Thus began in earnest the social movement with occupations in the Moselle.

According to the *préfet's* statistics, over 16,000 stopped work and occupied the coal mines of the Société Houillère de Sarre et Moselle in Petite-Rosselle, Creutzwald and Merlebach on 16 June.⁴⁷³ As at the national level, the occupiers took control of their workplace to prevent being locked-out and maintained the equipment as if it belonged to them. As a *commissaire spécial* reported, all

⁴⁶⁹ Taittinger's Jeunesses Patriotes became the Parti Républicain National et Social (PRNS) and Renaud's Solidarité Française, the Rassemblement Populaire Français (RPF).

⁴⁷⁰ APPP, Rapport 'Sur le Parti Populaire Français', nd, BA1946.

⁴⁷¹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au président du Conseil, Metz, 25 mai 1936, 98AL696.

⁴⁷² The Mosellan *patronat* officially accepted the Matignon agreement on 11 June. ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz au ministre de l'intérieur, Metz, 11 juin 1936, 301M57.

⁴⁷³ ADM, 'Tableau des grèves mai-juin-juillet 1936', 310M68.

commercial activity stopped, but *'le travail en cours d'exécution continue à être effectué. Les machines et fourneaux continuent à être entretenus.*⁴⁷⁴ The strikers blocked access to the shafts, and because they also blocked access to some neighbouring transformers, which delivered electricity to the large steelworks of Thionville and Briey, the *préfet* urged the trade unions and management to come to an agreement as soon as possible.⁴⁷⁵ Equally many mayors worried that their municipalities might run out of gas should the cocking plants not deliver theirs soon and urged the managers to enter negotiations with the workers. In the end, only after the mine managers agreed to enter negotiations with the trade unions on the establishment of collective agreements did work resume on 20 June.

At the same time, a new wave of strikes affecting both industry and business swept across the whole of the *département*. Workers from the iron mines demanded the same pay increases as the coal miners and 400 of them stopped work and occupied the Ida mine in Sainte-Marie until the *préfet* intervened and a collective contract was signed. The movement also involved the ceramics and metal factories in Sarreguemines where thousands of protesters occupied their factories in mid-June. The CGT issued a list of demands on their behalf, including paid holidays to all, collective contracts, a 40-hour week as well as *'l'obligation pour les entreprises ... de n'engager que du personnel syndiqué'* and *'[des] installations sanitaires telles que: infirmerie, bains, appareils pour chauffer la nourriture des ouvriers, installations de WC ... [et] de systèmes de ventilation'*.⁴⁷⁶

Strikes in the large steelworks around Thionville and Metz amplified the scale of the movement with tens of thousands of workers participating at the end of June: 10,000 at the de Wendel factories in Moyeuvre, Rosselange and Hayange, 4,000 at the UCPMI in Hagondange, 4,000 at the Société Lorraine des Acières de Rombas, 3,000 at the Société Métallurgique in Knutange. In the construction industry, nearly 10,000 workers from 284 different companies

⁴⁷⁴ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au sous-préfet, 15 juin 1936, 98AL696.

⁴⁷⁵ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 18 juin 1936, 98AL696.

⁴⁷⁶ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au ministre de l'Intérieur, 13 juin 1936, 98AL696.

stopped work on 4 July, including 480 engaged on a Maginot Line site in Rohrbach-lès-Bitche in the French Saarland.⁴⁷⁷ Companies involved with the construction of military equipment for the Line were also affected when 1,500 workers went on strike. In Metz, 200 poorly unionised shop assistants, many of whom were women, occupied the Prisunic and the Unifix shops on 27 June.

Although workers in many small businesses, such as the hosieries in Sarreguemines and the paper bag manufacturers in Forbach, joined the movement, the vast majority of the strikers were to be found in the large mines and factories: 24,000 in the steelworks, 16,000 in the coal mines and 7,500 in the iron mines. In all, almost 65,000 were involved in strikes between June and July, representing almost 25 percent of the workforce.⁴⁷⁸ More telling perhaps was the fact that 80 percent of all industrial and commercial firms were occupied during May and June. But after a long and warm summer of strikes and negotiations, the movement lost momentum. The last large strike of the summer took place in the ceramics factories in Sarreguemines when 1,700 stopped work in late August.⁴⁷⁹ Notwithstanding a few unresolved disputes in small firms, where the prefectural authorities had to intervene in order to help with the negotiations, the *préfet* reported far fewer and smaller strikes in the autumn.

As a result of the strike movement, the Mosellan CGT witnessed a sharp rise in its membership in what had hitherto been a poorly unionised *département*: from 10,600 in early January 1936 to almost 78,000 in late October, an eightfold increase.⁴⁸⁰ The numbers rose from 438 to 26,220 in the steelworks, from 150 to 7,500 in the construction industry and from 1,150 to 24,000 in the mining sector. In the Sarreguemines ceramics factories, where no trade union existed prior to the summer strikes, 1,500 joined the CGT. These four industries alone accounted for more than 75 percent of the *départementale* trade union membership. Nothing

⁴⁷⁷ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au sous-préfet, 20 juin 1936, 26Z3.

⁴⁷⁸ Statistique générale de la France, *Résultats Statistiques du Recensement Général de la Population effectué le 8 mars 1931*, Tome I, Troisième partie, p.13.

⁴⁷⁹ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre du Travail, Metz, 28 août 1936, 310M68.

⁴⁸⁰ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 24 novembre 1936, 98AL696.

illustrated more clearly the hitherto dormant potential of the Mosellan industrial workforce than this rapid, large-scale movement towards unionisation.

Albeit more dramatic, the trend in the Moselle reflected the national trend. As a Parisian police report stated, during a meeting of the CGT, Jouhaux affirmed that *'les adhésions parviennent à la CGT avec un rythme qui ne paraît pas se ralentir.'*⁴⁸¹ According to the same report, the rise was so rapid and unexpected that Jouhaux and the federation secretaries recognised *'le manque évident de cadres'* and *'le manque d'éducation de très nombreux travailleurs qui ne sont syndiqués qu'au moment des mouvements'*, which would pose serious problems for the application and the respect of the collective contracts.

The Mosellan federations faced similar issues. Thus in August 1936, the metalworkers' federation newspaper urged the new trade unionists *'d'écouter les mots d'ordre du syndicat, de rester unis derrière la CGT.'*⁴⁸² According to a prefectural report, the regional secretary-general of the CGT issued a note to all the section heads, appealing to new members *'dépourvus de traditions syndicales ... [de] s'abstenir de toute grève spontanée et irréfléchie, dans l'intérêt même des travailleurs.'*⁴⁸³ The *préfet* was pessimistic about the amount of time it would take to discipline the new members as the *cadres*, recruited hastily, also needed educating. As he wrote,

*Il faudra, évidemment, qu'un temps assez long s'écoule ... avant qu'une discipline vraiment satisfaisante s'établisse, d'autant plus que les cadres des délégués, recrutés en hâte, ont été fréquemment désignés, sans discernement suffisant.*⁴⁸⁴

Like the CGT, the Mosellan PCF enjoyed an increased membership: according to an internal party report, membership rose from 1,300 in June 1936 to 4,200 by the end of the year.⁴⁸⁵ Marc Dupuy, a delegate from the Central Committee on visit in the Moselle, seemed satisfied with developments. As he

⁴⁸¹ APPP, Rapport 'Au sujet des mouvements de grève', Paris, 30 juin 1936, BA1874. Prost estimates the number of CGT members at 2.5 million immediately after the June strikes, and almost 4 million at the end of 1936; in Prost, *Autour du Front Populaire*, p.154.

⁴⁸² 'Au Nouveau Syndiqué', *Le Métallurgiste*, août 1936, p.6.

⁴⁸³ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 24 mai 1937, 98AL634.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁵ ADSSD, 'Rapport sur effectifs et sections dans la région Lorraine', nd, 3Mi6/135 séquence 840.

stated in a report '*pour la première fois on peut dire que notre parti augmente ses effectifs en Lorraine*'.⁴⁸⁶ According to Dupuy, the party could have done better in this industrial region had it not been for the unresolved issues of particularism and language. As he wrote, the two main obstacles to a successful implantation of the party in the Moselle remained '*de fortes survivances sectaires ... chez un certain nombre de camarades du comité régional*' as well as difficulties due to '*des interventions faites en allemand et des erreurs de traduction*'.⁴⁸⁷ As he tried to rid the Mosellan federation of its sectarian legacy in order to attract new members, Anstett announced the creation of a party school designed to train '*de nouvelles forces dont notre parti a absolument besoin*'.⁴⁸⁸ Another indication of the PCF's desire to develop its influence among the Mosellan industrial masses was its decision to organise a two-day propaganda campaign headed by Thorez in the region.

L'affaire d'Alsace-Lorraine: an example of the right's unity and the left's divisions?

It was during the party's national conference on 10 and 11 July that the PCF leaders first mentioned the Communist deputies' plans to visit the Moselle and Alsace in October. The Mosellan police seemed to have first heard of the Communist plan in early August when a report mentioned that following the party's conference in July, '*Le parti envisagerait l'organisation de réunions, en Moselle, pour octobre prochain*'.⁴⁸⁹ One month later, Anstett issued a circular, urging all regional party cells to do their best to accommodate the 127 meetings planned in the Moselle and in Alsace for October. Fearing clashes between Communist and far-right supporters as well as what the *préfet* described as '*des incidents de*

⁴⁸⁶ ADSSD, 'Comite régional élargi du 21 juin 1936, Région de la Moselle, Rapport du Camarade Marc Dupuy, délégué du Comité Central', 3Mi6/126 séquence 796b.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁸ ADM, 'Circulaire du parti communiste région Lorraine', nd, signé Anstett, 301M78.

⁴⁸⁹ ADM, Rapport du commissaire Gare Centrale Metz au préfet, 9 août 1936, 301M78.

frontière avec le Reich', he asked the government to ban all the meetings.⁴⁹⁰ In a report, he cited *'l'importance que ... confère [au département] sa position frontalière, au point de vue de la Défense Nationale et de l'action à laquelle il est soumis de la part de la propagande allemande'*.⁴⁹¹ He also likened the situation of the Moselle to the events of 4 October when the Communist party organised a large rally at the Parc des Princes in Paris to promote French intervention in Spain, and the government posted a large number of police in order to prevent Communists from clashing with de la Rocque's supporters. Although the police succeeded in preventing the two sides from colliding on that occasion, the government ultimately decided to impose a temporary ban on public gatherings in Paris and its suburbs.

Before the *préfet's* persistent reports, the government urged the PCF to reduce the number of meetings. Following talks between the government and Duclos, the Communists agreed to reduce the number to 52. But as the *préfet* and the *sous-préfets* insisted all meetings should be banned, Blum compromised and ordered the PCF to limit to 10 the number of meetings: 3 in the Moselle and 7 in Alsace.⁴⁹² Blum explained his decision to Duclos in a letter:

*Le gouvernement ... a la charge de l'ordre public, auquel on ne peut laisser porter la moindre atteinte dans les départements frontières sans favoriser et alimenter les propagandes hostiles au régime démocratique, ou même hostiles à notre pays... En tenant compte de ces deux considérations, il a fixé et fixe encore à huit ou dix le nombre des réunions [en Alsace et en Lorraine].*⁴⁹³

A frustrated PCF issued a communiqué to the press in which it accused the government of denying the party its right to hold meetings and flouting the

⁴⁹⁰ Following an incident involving far right supporters against Communists in Spicheren in the French Saarland in August 1936, the German government made an official complaint to the French government. The *préfet* does not reveal what exactly occurred but it is clear that he did not wish to enter into a diplomatic row with Germany on the account of the Communists and the far right's activities; ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 6 octobre 1936, 301M79.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹² Until the morning of 10 October, *L'Humanité* advertised twenty-three meetings for the Moselle. Duclos, *Les réunions communistes en Alsace et en Lorraine sont interdites, sauf dix!*, *L'Humanité*, 10 octobre 1936, p.1.

⁴⁹³ 'Lettre de Blum à Duclos, 9 octobre 1936', published in *Le Populaire*, 11 octobre 1936, p.3.

programme of the Popular Front.⁴⁹⁴ Nonetheless it yielded to the government's injunction.

The three authorised meetings took place in Metz, Hagondange and Creutzwald. Marcel Gitton, Communist deputy for the Seine and a high-ranking official within the party, was originally scheduled to speak in Thionville on 10 October, but the right-wing mayor of the town issued a decree banning '*toutes réunions ou manifestations, tout rassemblement sur la voie publique ... pour une durée de 4 jours sur le territoire de la ville de Thionville*'.⁴⁹⁵ The largest meeting took place at the Palais de Cristal in Metz in the evening of 10 October. Before a crowd of approximately 1,000 supporters, local party officials, CGT leaders and the president of the *départemental* committee of the Popular Front welcomed Maurice Thorez and the party of Communist deputies that accompanied him.⁴⁹⁶ As chair of the gathering, Noizette, leader of the Metz cell, spoke of the difficulties the party faced with regards to meetings in the region in both German and French. Then he introduced Thorez, who spoke for one hour. During his speech, the party leader commented on the new social laws, the recent devaluation of the franc which the PCF backed, the embargo imposed on Spain which he condemned and generally restated his support to the Popular Front government and its policies.⁴⁹⁷

But before Thorez could finish his allocution, the meeting suddenly darkened. The organisers installed some makeshift lighting. Despite the Communists' claims of the far right's involvement with the power failure, the *préfet* affirmed that the electrician brought on site found no evidence of sabotage. But almost thirty years later, Paul Durand, a disciple of Ritz and an ex-journalist at *Le Lorrain*, revealed that the power failure had in fact been the work of Emile Groff,

⁴⁹⁴ 'Communiqué de presse du Parti communiste, 10 octobre 1936', *Le Populaire*, 11 octobre 1936, p.3.

⁴⁹⁵ ADM, 'Arrêté, maire de Thionville', 10 octobre 1936, 301M79.

⁴⁹⁶ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 11 octobre 1936, 301M79.

⁴⁹⁷ Following Laval's unpopular policy of deflation in 1935, Blum initially followed a deliberate policy of reflation in the hope that the workers' increased wages and holidays would stimulate demand. In September, while still maintaining reflation, he also applied a devaluation of the Franc hoping that the capital that had left France in the spring of 1936 would return.

an electrical engineer antipathetic to the Communists.⁴⁹⁸ Unfortunately, it has not been possible to discover if Groff acted alone or in a group, or if he was instructed to cut the power by some third-party.

But in any case, the damage had already been done: what was supposed to be simply a demonstration of the power of the Communist propaganda machine had turned into a public disagreement between the PCF and the Popular Front government. Thorez criticised Blum's decision to heed to what he called '*des injonctions fascistes*'.⁴⁹⁹ The Socialist swiftly rejected Thorez's accusations and denied the right-wing press' prediction of the near end of the coalition by claiming that the Popular Front was as strong as ever.⁵⁰⁰ Nonetheless *Le Populaire* blamed the Communists' habitual practice '*d'annoncer publiquement leurs initiatives en plaçant souvent leurs alliés devant le fait accompli*' and questioned the PCF's need '*de fournir aux ennemis des arguments faux ... mais qui avaient l'apparence de la réalité*'. Despite Thorez's public praise of the Popular Front in Metz, the left-wing coalition was in crisis and *l'affaire d'Alsace-Lorraine* - as the event became known – deepened the rift between the PCF and the government. *L'affaire* is of particular interest to this study because it was also *the* catalyst for the Mosellan right's offensive against the Popular Front and the Communists. As shall be demonstrated in the next chapter, it was in reaction to the Communist meetings in the *département* that the hitherto quiescent right and far right began to work together.

Conclusion

Despite the victory of the Popular Front at the national level, election results in the Moselle reveal the left's persistent struggle to establish itself in the region. Yet it is also possible to say that the national trend of the electorate's shift towards the extremes was replicated in the Moselle. For the first time since the return of the

⁴⁹⁸ Paul Durand, *Le Visage des Nôtres: 30 ans de petite histoire messine et lorraine 1920-1950*, Metz: Editions Le Lorrain, 1953, p.58.

⁴⁹⁹ Thorez, *Fils du Peuple*, p.135.

⁵⁰⁰ 'Les dix réunions communistes en Alsace-Lorraine', *Le Populaire*, 11 octobre 1936, p.3.

region to French sovereignty, new parties, especially on the far right, entered the local political arena and challenged the hegemony of the once-dominant Union Républicaine Lorraine. At the same time, the latter showed signs of weakness as friction began to appear and multiple candidacies occurred in a few key constituencies. In view of the intense political, economic and social changes that France and the region experienced at the time, it is possible that the particularist views of the Union Républicaine Lorraine appeared somewhat outdated and irrelevant to some voters. What is more, it is also likely that the new right-wing parties' political culture (parades, rallies, picnics, dance parties and so on) attracted voters too young to have known the German domination and who envied Germany's new order. Regarding the strikes, it is clear that they gave the workers a new political and social identity. In the Moselle this new identity seemed to take precedence over that of regional identity. Indeed, for the first time since 1918 the Mosellan working masses massively participated in a national movement. Whereas the large strikes of 1919-1920 were intrinsically bound up with the difficulties arising from the *département's* assimilation into French sovereignty (see chapter One), those of 1936 were set in a national social and political context.

As for the PCF campaign in the region, it revealed a deep fracture between the Communists and the Popular Front government and the latter's irritation over the former's hidden political agenda. While it is clear that the PCF wanted to remain in the Popular Front coalition – and if possible lead it - it also tried to capitalise on the success of the strikes and expand its influence among the workers of France and the Moselle. By following this dual policy, a clash with its allies in government appeared inevitable. As Blum ordered the Communist leadership to tone down its propaganda campaign and to limit the number of meetings to three in the Moselle, the PCF issued strongly worded communiqués to which the Socialist *Le Populaire* responded to in a similar fashion. By an unfortunate turn of events for the PCF and the left in general, the Communist campaign triggered the radicalisation of local right wingers and the rise of what appeared to be an organised right.

Chapter Four - Counter-offensive and Divisions, October 1936 - February 1937

Introduction

In October 1936, when the PCF launched its campaign in the Moselle, local right wingers began their counter-offensive. The Mosellan press, in particular *Le Messin* and *Le Lorrain*, intensified their opposition to the Popular Front and the Communist party. Local notables, fearing a 'red' revolution, joined forces to create a movement that sought to draw together all the anti-Communist elements of society. As the fastest-growing political party in the Moselle, the Parti Social Français seized the opportunity to appear as *the* genuine anti-Communist force in the region. It created trade unions, which sought to combat the rising influence of the CGT and the Christian trade unions in the industrial sectors. As the right became more organised and began to work together, at least in appearance, the left confronted two other serious difficulties. The main one was the Spanish Civil War, which divided the left-wing political class throughout France between interventionists and non-interventionists. In the Moselle, the parties of the Popular Front coalition displayed similar divisions. Like the PCF national leaders, local Communists identified with the Spanish Popular Front and were actively engaged in the Republican cause. But while attempting a balancing act by organising support for the Spanish Republic and doing its best to appear as the guardians of the unity of the Popular Front coalition, the PCF also acted to challenge its unity by trying to gain control of the CGT.

This chapter is divided into two parts. As the first part will demonstrate, it was the left's excesses, such as the Communist campaign in the Moselle and the recrudescence of strikes in 1937, which led Mosellan right wingers to work together albeit on certain restrictive conditions. The second part will examine how at the same time, the Popular Front coalition and the PCF in particular sought to address two major issues that threatened the unity of the coalition and the internal unity of the parties: the Spanish Civil War and the control of the CGT.

Part One: the Right's Counter-Offensive

The Press

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the victory of the Popular Front revealed a weakening of the moderates and a shift to the extremes for both the left and the right. During the summer of 1936, while the Mosellan *patronat* began negotiating collective contracts with trade union representatives, some right wingers thought that enough was enough and that something had to be done to counteract what *Le Messin* called '*les fauteurs de désordre, le communisme et le marxisme*'.⁵⁰¹ As a strong opponent of the government and the PCF, Frederic Certonciny, *Le Messin*'s political editor, reported conversations he allegedly had with right wingers. According to him, they expressed their loathing of Communism by declaring,

*vivoter ... dans une France amoindrie, révoltée, bolchevisée, non! S'il doit en être ainsi, nous préférons redevenir Allemands! Car l'Allemagne a raison à l'heure actuelle. Elle au moins sait se faire respecter.*⁵⁰²

Certonciny's article compared the situation in France where '*c'est toujours le chaos*' to that of Germany '*dont l'ordre civique mérite d'être pris comme exemple*.' As for *Le Lorrain* it blamed the Communists for abusing the workers' faith in some illusionary social progress and, with a reference to the period of the *Reichsland*, asked, '*Où étaient-ils [ces révolutionnaires], hier, quand il fallait lutter ... pour rester ce que nous sommes?*'⁵⁰³ It then vowed to act as the defender '*des autels et foyers lorrains, des écoles et familles lorraines*' and exclaimed, '*Faire de nous des serviteurs de Moscou? Jamais! Faire la révolution à la frontière pour détourner de Moscou et attirer sur nous la guerre allemande? Jamais!*'⁵⁰⁴

It was during that time that Metz's third major Francophone daily first made its appearance. Victor Demange, owner of the *Metzer Freies Journal*, launched *Le*

⁵⁰¹ 'Pour une France forte et unie contre le marxisme et le bolchévisme', *Le Messin*, 13 september 1936, p.1.

⁵⁰² Frédéric, Certonciny, 'Tout plutôt qu'une France révolutionnaire et bolchevisée... nous disent des patriotes lorrains', *Le Messin*, 22 août 1936, p.1.

⁵⁰³ 'Aux Français de Lorraine', *Le Lorrain*, 13 septembre 1936, p.1.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Républicain Lorrain on 13 September 1936. According to Demange, the newspaper, '*ardemment désiré par les laborieuses populations de notre région frontière*', would offer a form of journalism devoid of '*doctrine outrancière*' and serve the cause of France with this motto: '*France d'abord*'.⁵⁰⁵ It sought to serve the interests of '*la petite comme de la grande patrie*' (Moselle and France), but was far less particularist than its two main competitors, *Le Lorrain* and *Le Messin*. And unlike the latter two it was not backed by the diocese. Compared to the violent diatribes vociferated against the Popular Front by *Le Lorrain* and *Le Messin*, the newcomer appeared sympathetic to the left-wing coalition. Following the CGT's large demonstration in Metz on 27 September, *Le Républicain Lorrain* described how the 15,000 CGT supporters who came to listen to Jouhaux '*ont defilé en bon ordre dans les rues de la ville*' and how '*chacun se [conformait] strictement aux instructions qui avaient été données*'.⁵⁰⁶ In comparison, *Le Lorrain* described the démonstration as '*un bien édifiant cortège*' and compared the turnout, which it estimated at no more than 12,000, to '*ce que les pèlerins de Lourdes à longueur d'année contemplant au soir d'une journée creuse et dont on ne dit rien*'.⁵⁰⁷

Fearing a red revolution with the visit of the Communist deputies to the *département* in October, *Le Lorrain* reported that it was during Thorez's trip to the Soviet Union before the party's national conference in July that Stalin and Georgi Dimitrov, the secretary-general of the Comintern, demanded an intensification of the French Communists' propaganda in France's industrial regions.⁵⁰⁸ Although it has not been possible to verify this claim, the newspaper stated that this had led to the PCF's decision to launch meetings in the *département* for 10 and 11 October. But to many contemporary right wingers, the Communists' plans were simply unacceptable. Before the *préfet*'s powerlessness to ban the meetings, *Le Lorrain*, *Le Messin*, Antoni's Christlich-Soziale Partei, Vautrin, Ritz, deputies Sérot (Metz

⁵⁰⁵ ADBR, Affiche 'A La Population Lorraine, *Le Républicain Lorrain*', nd, 98AL1095.

⁵⁰⁶ 'M. Léon Jouhaux à Metz', *Le Républicain Lorrain*, 28 septembre 1936, p.1.

⁵⁰⁷ Rudemont, 'Parapluies et Eglantines, La Manifestation cégétiste', *Le Lorrain*, 28 septembre 1936, p.2. According to the PCF 50,000 supporters participated in the gathering; Marcel Cachin, 'Notre tournée en Alsace et en Lorraine', *L'Humanité*, 7 octobre 1936, p.1.

⁵⁰⁸ 'L'effort des Soviets contre la Lorraine', *Le Lorrain*, 28 septembre 1936, p.2.

Campagne), Harter (Forbach) and Beaudouin (Château-Salins) and a long list of unnamed *conseillers généraux*, mayors, shop owners, businessmen, farmers, workers and teachers joined forces to create an anti-Marxist committee called the Front Lorrain in September 1936.

The Front Lorrain

Albert Eiselé, a young lawyer and the secretary-general of the association, described the Front Lorrain as '*un groupement politique des hommes, des partis, et des organisations qui en Moselle entendent collaborer au maintien de l'ordre et de la paix sociale par la parole et par l'action*'.⁵⁰⁹ Despite the fact that the Front Lorrain was governed by one secretary-general and two presidents - Vautrin and the Union Républicaine Lorraine deputy Sérot - it is clear that Ritz, by using his journalistic skills and *Le Lorrain* to disseminate the committee's messages, was the driving force behind it. At the local level, *comités locaux* and *comités d'arrondissements* were created in order to represent '*chaque parti politique constitué dans une commune*' as well as '*des personnalités représentatives des ouvriers, des paysans, des employés, des commerçants, des artisans ainsi que des professions libérales ... adhérents au Front Lorrain*'. At its head sat a self-governing executive committee whose main duties were to administer the organisation and comprised one representative from each organisation. Soon after its creation, the committee published a five-point programme in which it criticised '*la partialité du pouvoir central ... [les] grèves a caractère révolutionnaire*' which led to '*[des] patrons désemparés, l'augmentation du coût de la vie ... [la] nervosité croissante du peuple qui se divise en deux camps*'.⁵¹⁰ Above all it condemned '*les progrès considérables du parti bolchevik qui envisage la prise du pouvoir par des moyens révolutionnaires*'.

Much like the Croix de Feu, the first point of the Front Lorrain's programme advocated, under the title '*Lutte pour la défense de la famille*', a return to the

⁵⁰⁹ ADM, 'Statuts du Front Lorrain', Metz, nd, 301M80.

⁵¹⁰ ADM, 'Programme du Front Lorrain', Metz, nd, 301M80.

traditional values of respect and protection of the family. Its second point, entitled '*Collaboration harmonieuse des ouvriers et des patrons*', promoted '*un système économique adapté aux conditions modernes, avec, comme élément de base les syndicats débarrassés de tout caractère politique*', '*la lutte contre le capitalisme anonyme et international*', '*[l']établissement d'un ordre social nouveau préservant le faible contre les abus du capitalisme exploiteur et l'emprise marxiste*', and '*[une] large amélioration du sort de l'ouvrier ... et notamment protection ouvrière satisfaisante contre tous les risques (accident, mort, maladie, chômage...)*'. Its third point encouraged the valorisation of peasantry and the products of the regional terroir. Its fourth promised to safeguard '*toutes nos traditions lorraines*' without giving a clear explanation as to what those values referred to. Its fifth and final point supported the defence of domestic and foreign order and peace: '*Le Front Lorrain veut la paix intérieure et extérieure du pays, et proteste contre toute politique imprudente susceptible de diviser la France et l'Europe en deux camps dont la rivalité pourrait entraîner... la révolution, la guerre.*' Although the programme made no mention of the Catholic Church, in private Ritz emphasised the organisation's role as defender of the Catholic faith. In a private meeting of the Action Catholique Lorraine in September 1936, he claimed to be one of the main architects of the Front Lorrain whose immediate aims were, in the *préfet's* words, '*de lutter contre les théories communistes, s'efforce[r] de défendre, par tous les moyens, les particularités lorraines et la religion catholique.*'⁵¹¹

The Front Lorrain was also willing to ally with third party organisations with similar views to theirs as indicated in its programme: '*le Front Lorrain ... se joindra aux groupements similaires créés dans d'autres régions de France.*' The most important group it joined was the Rassemblement National Lorrain. Created in reaction to the rise of the PCF in neighbouring Meurthe-et-Moselle in July 1936, the Rassemblement National Lorrain benefited from the backing of Louis Marin and claimed tens of thousands of supporters across the *département*. With an official motto of '*Ordre, Paix, Travail*', the movement's aim was '*la réconciliation*

⁵¹¹ AN, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 30 septembre 1936, F7/14614.

*nationale ... [et] combattre le Communisme qui mène notre pays à la ruine et à la guerre.*⁵¹² It also severely criticised the CGT, whose leader Jouhaux was portrayed as '*le bœuf gras qui gagne bien sa vie.*' As a display of solidarity with the Mosellan formation, the Rassemblement National Lorrain published an anti-Communist text co-signed by the Front Lorrain in its bi-monthly paper a few weeks before Thorez's visit to the Moselle. The text, which adorned the walls of Metz in early October, declared '*Non! M. Thorez. Vous n'aurez pas l'Alsace et la Lorraine. Et, malgré vous, nous resterons Français.*'⁵¹³

Ritz was a strong supporter of the Rassemblement National Lorrain and at a private meeting organised by the Meurthe-et-Mosellan group in a Nancy suburb on 25 October, he was, as the Front Lorrain's representative, one of the guests and speakers of honour.⁵¹⁴ If the two movements shared similar doctrines, why did they not unite in a large regional group that would have encompassed the anti-Communists of the Moselle and the Meurthe-et-Moselle? After all, was their primary aim not to unite all *nationaux* in order to defeat Communism? Despite a lack of evidence, it seems likely that the old tacit agreement of Meurthe-et-Mosellan right-wing politicians' of non-interference in Mosellan politics still prevailed and that both movements were willing to support each other as long as they did not intrude on each other's territory.

Regarding the Communist meeting in Metz of October, the *préfet* reported that the Parti Social Français led the Front Lorrain and the Union Nationale des Combattants in an anti-Communist campaign. He wrote that they manifested '*leurs fermes intentions de contre manifester et créer une perturbation violente*', should

⁵¹² *La Lorraine Nationale et Sociale*, 11 octobre 1936, p.1.

⁵¹³ The poster was also co-signed by the Parti Social Français and the Union Nationale des Combattants. ADM, Affiche de propagande, 'Non Monsieur Thorez!', Imprimerie du journal Le Messin, 9 octobre 1936, 301M79.

⁵¹⁴ According to *La Lorraine Nationale et Sociale*, the meeting gathered 35,000 supporters. 8 November 1936, p.1. Owing to Marin's sponsorship, the *Rassemblement National Lorrain* succeeded in attracting the support of well-known national figures: Xavier Vallat, Philippe Henriot, Jacques Doriot, General Weygand, Chiappe, deputy for the Seine and ex-*préfet* de police de Paris, who described Marin as '*le plus intègre de nos parlementaires, rayonnant de loyauté et de fidélité.*'; in 'La brillante réunion du Rex', *La Lorraine Nationale et Sociale*, 14 mars 1937, p.1.

the Communist gathering take place.⁵¹⁵ Vautrin, a central figure of the Front Lorrain, sent the *préfet* numerous letters and reports requesting a ban of the Communist Metz gathering but to no avail. Later, he sent Blum a telegram in which he threatened and implored France's Premier to intervene.

*Ma qualité de Français et ma charge de Maire de Metz m'imposent rendre gouvernement attentif au grand danger pour paix et sécurité dans ville frontière si manifestation communiste ... n'est pas interdite de façon absolue. Par présent avertissement dégage ma responsabilité et supplie décider interdiction.*⁵¹⁶

In one of his columns in *L'Humanité*, Marcel Cachin made a reference to Vautrin's requests: '*les amis de M. de la Rocque ... en Lorraine se déclarent opposés à notre propagande. Ils écrivent des lettres où ils annoncent des incidents graves, où « ils dégagent leurs responsabilités ».*⁵¹⁷ Cachin's response to Vautrin and the Front Lorrain was: '*Devant ce nouvel assaut des hitlériens français, qui sert de préparation à un nouveau 6 Février, nous pensons que ... nos organisations ... ne doivent [pas] reculer. Notre parti tiendra ses réunions en ... Lorraine.*'⁵¹⁸ Before Blum's silence, Vautrin wrote a public letter to the inhabitants of Metz. Published by *Le Lorrain* and posted on the walls of Metz in the morning of 10 October, Vautrin's letter urged the population to '*garder un sang-froid et un calme réfléchi*' towards '*l'injure communiste voulue et ordonnée par des agitateurs étrangers.*'⁵¹⁹ It also mentioned the mayor's attempts to have the meeting cancelled: '*tout a été fait pour [nous] épargner ce fléau.... Nous n'avons pas réussi.*' But despite the mayor's calls for calm, Thorez's visit in Metz ended in violent clashes between Communists and far right activists. Little is known of the influence of the Front Lorrain on the local political scene in the period following its

⁵¹⁵ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 6 octobre 1936, 301M79.

⁵¹⁶ ADM, 'Télégramme de Vautrin, Maire de Metz, à la présidence du Conseil', nd, 301M79.

⁵¹⁷ Marcel Cachin, 'Les agents de Hitler ne feront pas la loi en Alsace!', *L'Humanité*, 6 octobre 1936, p.1.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ ADM, Poster 'Appel à la population de Metz de Paul Vautrin', Metz, 10 octobre 1936, 301M79.

creation, but it is clear that the movement marked the readiness of some panic-stricken right wingers for unity.⁵²⁰

Echoing the celebrated right-wing slogan, '*Plutôt Hitler que Blum*', Ritz wrote in one of his editorial columns, '*Plutôt Hitler que Moscou*';⁵²¹ thus joining *Le Messin's* '*nous préférons redevenir Allemands*'. There is no denying that Communism stirred passions among Mosellan right wingers. Even Herriot's speech of 17 June 1924 on the gallicisation and secularisation of the *département* did not stir such passionate reactions.⁵²² What is more, Ritz had spent four years in Germany as a political prisoner during the Great War and always been a strong supporter of the return to France during the German annexation and his views, close to Maurice Barrès's nationalism and revanchism, left no doubt as to his profound loathing of Germany. For him to claim that he chose Hitler over Stalin did not automatically imply sympathy towards Germany and the Nazi regime. Instead, it indicated his perception of where the immediate danger to France and the Moselle was: Communism and the Soviet Union.

Interestingly enough, Jean-François Colas does not mention Ritz's '*Plutôt Hitler que Moscou*' when describing the *abbé's* position towards Germany in his doctoral thesis. Instead, Colas believes that Ritz distrusted both Germany and the Soviet Union and refused to join the groups of pacifist anti-Communist politicians who rated a war with the Soviet Union as the worst possible danger of all, and a rapprochement with Germany a lesser but necessary evil. Colas refers to two articles written by Ritz in *Le Lorrain* to prove his point. In the first, published in December 1935, Ritz wrote, '*Ce n'est point le but de cet article de défendre Berlin contre Moscou ou Moscou contre Berlin. Car nous mettons [le Communisme et le Nazisme] dans le même sac.*'⁵²³ In the second, published in August 1936, Ritz re-affirmed this position by stating: '*A l'Est, dans le national-socialisme allemand,*

⁵²⁰ It has not been possible to learn the exact number of individuals and organisations supporting the Front Lorrain.

⁵²¹ The expression was reported in Marcel Edmond Naegelen's article 'Les cléricaux prêchent la guerre civile en Alsace', *Le Populaire*, 22 septembre 1936, p.1 and in *Le Républicain Lorrain's* editorial 'Ni Hitler! Ni Moscou!', 7 octobre 1936, p.1.

⁵²² See chapter 1.

⁵²³ Colas, *op.cit.*, p.602.

*s'étend le danger qui nous guette.... Nous Lorrains, qui connaissons le nazisme, nous ne voulons pas plus de Hitler que de Staline. Nous abhorrons autant le nazisme que le bolchévisme.*⁵²⁴

Without denying the fact that Ritz did indeed write many articles criticising Nazi Germany as well as the Communist Soviet Union, Colas makes no mention of Ritz's increasingly radicalised views against Moscow and the PCF. Because the two articles Colas uses predated the October 1936 Communist propaganda campaign, which had led to the culmination of the radicalisation of the right, his work does not offer a true picture of Ritz as it does not reflect the latter's changed attitude. This attitude was not particular to Ritz or Mosellan politicians. At the national level, many right wingers considered the Soviet Union far more dangerous an enemy than Germany, therefore favouring an appeasement policy towards the latter. This changed attitude, which clearly marked the readiness of some right wingers to adopt views hitherto largely supported by some on the far right, was a strong indicator that the period of the Popular Front further deepened the rift between left and right.

With only a few communiqués in the local press and irregular meetings, which occurred principally before the cantonal elections of October 1937, it would appear that the Front Lorrain did not achieve its aim of gathering all the *nationaux* in an anti-Communist movement. Perhaps because it refused to become a political organisation and remained what was in effect a loose association of disparate organisations and individuals who shared a common hatred of Communism, it lacked the direction and the impetus to become the true defender of '*[les] autels et foyers lorrains, [les] écoles et familles lorraines.*' Although *Le Lorrain* claimed it counted thousands of fee-paying *adhérents* and *membres* in the Francophone regions of Metz and Château-Salins, its audience was rather limited.⁵²⁵ Indeed,

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁵ According to Colas, the association counted 10,000 fee-paying *adhérents* and between 1,200 and 5,200 *membres* in March 1937; Colas, *op.cit.*, p.216. The difference between the *adhérents* and the *membres* was purely financial: the first paid a maximum yearly fee of five francs and the second a minimum yearly fee of five francs; ADM, 'Statuts du Front Lorrain', 18 novembre 1936, 301M80.

apart from the readership of the Francophone dailies, it never really succeeded in attracting supporters in the predominantly German or dialect-speaking regions along the German border or in the rural and industrial areas. As revealed in a letter from the Front Lorrain's secretary-general, in spite of the backing of some local newspapers and notables in Sarrebourg and Forbach, the majority of followers were located around Metz.⁵²⁶ But most significantly, the largest obstacle for the Front Lorrain was possibly the appearance on the local political scene of a fast-growing political force and future adversary, the Parti Social Français.

The Parti Social Français

As briefly mentioned earlier, de la Rocque created the Parti Social Français after the government banned the Croix de Feu and his other associations in June 1936. The new party, whose motto was *Travail – Famille – Patrie*, held its inaugural meeting in Paris on 12 July 1936. Concerning its position within France's polarised political arena, the party claimed it was neither left-wing nor right-wing as it claimed, '*Nous méprisons autant la droite que la gauche.*'⁵²⁷ In its programme, published a few weeks later, the new party proclaimed its raison d'être to be patriotism and social aspiration based on Christian values: '*le patriotisme n'est pas le monopole de la droite et l'aspiration sociale n'est pas d'avantage monopole de gauche.*'⁵²⁸ According to Albert Kéchichian, within a few days of its creation the party could claim over 400,000 members, of which 150,000 came directly from the banned Croix de Feu and 200,000 from the Mouvement Social Français.⁵²⁹ De la Rocque did not hide the link between the banned *ligue* and his new organisation. As he boasted in his party's programme: '*On peut dissoudre une organisation, on*

⁵²⁶ ADM, Lettre de Albert Eiselé, secrétaire général du Front Lorrain, au préfet, Metz, 22 juin 1937, 301M80.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁸ Ascomemo, Parti Social Français, *Parti Social Français, Une Mystique, Un Programme*, 1936, p.6, 26EDG.

⁵²⁹ Kéchichian, *op.cit.*, p.369.

*ne peut rien contre les âmes... La mystique Croix de Feu éclaire, dirige, anime l'action du Parti Social Français.*⁵³⁰

In the Moselle, the new party swiftly established itself as one of the largest political parties in terms of members and the principal rival to both left-wing and right-wing organisations. The *préfet* reported the first signs of its existence in the *département* in July 1936, when he noted that the Parti Social Français '*manifeste à Metz, depuis quelque temps, une certaine activité sous l'impulsion des anciens dirigeants départementaux... des Croix de Feu et Volontaires Nationaux*'.⁵³¹ He estimated its membership to be 8,500 for the whole *département* (the Croix de Feu counted 12,000 members in March 1936) and noted its activity particularly in Thionville and in Sarrebourg '*qui était un centre important de membres et sympathisants des associations dissoutes*.' By November, the Mosellan federation was completely organised: it had headquarters in Metz, a president, Andrès (the last president of the dissolved Croix de Feu) and numerous local sections spread across the *département*. Its membership was estimated at approximately 17,600 members for the *département*; 2,200,000 for the whole of France.⁵³² By December, the *préfet* estimated that only 40 percent of the current members were ex-Croix de Feu; the remaining 60 percent had never before joined a political organisation. He also believed that, '*il est indiscutable que ... [avec] ses cadres décidés et actifs ce parti aura ... une influence importante sur la vie politique de notre région*'.⁵³³

According to the *préfet*, the party could rely on the support of many elected local officials, including Ritz and *Le Lorrain's* editor Paul Durand who also

⁵³⁰ Ascomemo, Parti Social Français, *Parti Social Français, Une Mystique, Un Programme*, 1936, p.4, 26EDG.

⁵³¹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 24 juillet 1936, 98AL674-1.

⁵³² ADBR, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz au préfet, 4 décembre 1936, 98AL674-1. Sources on the membership of the Parti Social Français provide contradictory figures. By early 1937, the party claimed 1.5 million members; the police estimated the national membership at 700,000 members; in Kennedy, *op.cit.*, pp.193-194.

⁵³³ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz au préfet, 31 décembre 1936, 98AL674-1.

happened to preside the Malgré-Nous veteran association.⁵³⁴ Barely a few weeks after the creation of the Parti Social Français, Vautrin attended a private meeting where Charles Vallin, member of the national executive committee, presented in front of a 2,500-strong audience the party's programme. The *préfet* noted that the mayor of Metz 'a été salué dès son arrivée par une chaleureuse ovation'.⁵³⁵ In Bitche, a *commissaire spécial adjoint* remarked that 'les maires de plusieurs communes sont inscrits au [Parti Social Français]' and the *commissaire de police de Sarrebourg* reported the same occurrence in his district.⁵³⁶ But the two *commissaires* also noted that the party, though very active, counted fewer members than the Croix de Feu.

The *commissaire* in Sarrebourg had an explanation for this: many ex-Croix de Feu were disappointed in de la Rocque's reaction after the legislative elections and therefore decided not to follow him in the Parti Social Français. Kéchichian reports a similar occurrence in a Parisian section where one quarter of the members left the *ligue* after the May elections.⁵³⁷ In his opinion, the *ligueurs* seemed confused by de la Rocque's claim that the Popular Front won the elections on the Croix de Feu's programme while at the same time discrediting the political right for losing the elections.

With a programme centred on the values of labour, family and love of the fatherland, the party made the government and the Communists its prime enemies. At a private meeting in the small village of Bliesbruck, Massart, a locksmith from Sarreguemines, criticised the government's actions based on its *Pain-Paix-Liberté* programme.⁵³⁸ Regarding peace, he claimed that the government's inability to contain the strike movement endangered peace at the domestic and international levels. He then condemned the factory occupations and

⁵³⁴ The Malgré-Nous association gathered Alsatian and Mosellan veterans drafted into the German army during the Great War. The term Malgré-Nous would later be used again to describe those in Alsace-Moselle forcibly enrolled in the German army during the Second World War.

⁵³⁵ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 5 août 1936, 98AL674-1.

⁵³⁶ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire spécial adjoint au commissaire spécial, Bitche, 14 décembre 1936, 98AL674-1.

⁵³⁷ Kéchichian states that the losses were in fact minimal as the large majority of Croix de Feu members followed de la Rocque in his new party; Kéchichian, *op.cit.*, p.369.

⁵³⁸ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 23 décembre 1936, 98AL674-1.

the recent restrictions imposed on the press as serious breaches to freedom.⁵³⁹ He concluded by blaming the government for the price rises which nullified the pay increases workers received after June 1936. According to him, the government's sole aim was to apply the PCF's programme and the only party capable of preventing this was de la Rocque's. Although the Parti Social Français presented itself as neither left nor right and as the party of national reconciliation, which stood above the political conflict, its priority was anti-Communism. In December 1936, the section of Merten urged its members to prepare '*une lutte sans merci contre le communisme*', as the *préfet* wrote in a report.⁵⁴⁰

But it was before and after the PCF's meetings of 10 and 11 October that the party's anti-Communism became sharply apparent. Indeed, as police reports concluded, the Parti Social Français led the campaign against the the Communist tour in the *département*. In a letter to the *préfet*, the president of the *départemental* federation warned of '*les incidents graves ... [qui] peuvent surgir*' if the meetings were to take place.⁵⁴¹ The party was not alone in asking for a ban: the Union Nationale des Combattants, the Front Lorrain, the Malgré-Nous and the Comité de Rassemblement Anti-Soviétique (CRAS) also wrote to the *préfet*.⁵⁴² But while the Union Nationale des Combattants and the Front Lorrain responded favourably to the *préfet*'s request to cancel their planned counter-manifestation in Metz on the evening of the 10th, the Parti Social Français refused to cede and decided to

⁵³⁹ Following Roger Salengros' suicide on 16 November 1936, the Chamber of deputies voted a new piece of legislation that limited the press's right to slander. Because Salengro was Minister of the Interior when the Popular Front banned the *ligues*, the right-wing press launched a virulent defamatory campaign against him. Far-right newspapers such as *Action Française* and *Gringoire* claimed that Salengro had deserted the army during the Great War. Despite the National Assembly's vote of confidence in his favour on 13 November, Salengro yielded under the pressure and committed suicide in his flat in Lille. In a suicidal note he wrote to Blum, Salengro wrote, '*J'ai lutté ... mais je suis à bout. S'ils n'ont pu réussir à me déshonorer, du moins porteront-ils la responsabilité de ma mort car je ne suis ni un déserteur ni un traître.*' AN, Blum papers, Note de Salengro à Blum, 16 novembre 1936, 570AP13.

⁵⁴⁰ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 9 décembre 1936, 98AL674-1.

⁵⁴¹ ADM, Lettre du Parti Social Français, fédération de la Moselle, Metz, 3 octobre 1936, 301M79.

⁵⁴² The CRAS committees were created in June 1936 in reaction to the strike movement and in anticipation of what some believed to be an imminent Communist coup. They gathered many *ex-ligueurs* and as stated in a letter to Marin they sought to '*rassembler toutes les opinions politiques se réclamant du même idéal national*' in "*comités de self-defense*" *contre le Communisme*'; AN, Marin papers, Lettre du Comité central du CRAS à Louis Marin, Paris, 27 juin 36, 317AP72.

proceed with its original plans. As a result, some of its members gathered around the Palais de Cristal impatiently waiting for Thorez to finish his speech (in near darkness) and for his supporters to come out.

According to the *préfet*, around 3,000 anti-Communists gathered in the streets surrounding the Palais de Cristal at 8 o'clock in the evening; many of whom, he believed, '*appartenant ... à des groupements d'extrême-droite et au Parti Social Français.*'⁵⁴³ As they attempted but failed to break through the police barricades during the meeting, the demonstrators threw stones at the police and army forces. The latter dispersed the protesters and created a safety cordon for the Communists. The cordon went from the Place Gambetta, where the meeting took place, to Metz train station; roughly 2 kilometres long. After the Communists left the hall, the far right supporters followed them to the train station taunting them with cries of '*La France aux Français!*' and '*Vive la Rocque!*' Despite the police efforts to control the crowd, far right demonstrators burned red flags and exchanged blows with a few Communists.⁵⁴⁴ While some police officers succeeded in escorting the majority of Communists to the station platforms, others contained the far right supporters outside the station.

Spurred by the Communists' departure, the far right demonstrators headed for the centre of Metz shouting and singing. On their way, they stopped outside the Palais du Gouverneur (the residence of the highest ranking military officer in Metz) where General Henri Giraud, the current military governor, lived. They waited for him to appear on his balcony, which he did to their great satisfaction. They cheered and gave him a long ovation before heading for the mayor's house. Vautrin, who was also happy to oblige, saluted them and received an enthusiastic response. They finished their tour by stationing themselves outside *Le Lorrain* and *Le Messin's* windows as a demonstration of solidarity. Soon after, police forces intervened in order to stop fights involving far right demonstrators against employees of *Le Républicain Lorrain*. After dispersing the crowd and emptying the rue Serpenoise, where the newspaper's office was located and where the scuffle

⁵⁴³ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 11 octobre 1936, 301M79.

⁵⁴⁴ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial Gare Centrale Metz au préfet, 11 octobre 1936, 301M79.

had occurred, the police proceeded to a few arrests and posted a permanent guard outside the office. According to some eye witnesses, the fights broke out after the newspaper's personnel derided the demonstrators by whistling at them and one employee doused them with water from a fire extinguisher. But Victor Demange, the owner of the newspaper, contested this version of events, insisting that his employees had never provoked the demonstrators.

Despite these incidents, which resulted in some arrests and several injuries among the demonstrators and the police, the *préfet* concluded that '*malgré l'agitation ... la soirée du 10 octobre ... s'est déroulée... sans incident grave.*'⁵⁴⁵ In Creutzwald, where one of the other two authorised meetings took place, the *commissaire spécial* stated that during the meeting, which attracted 600 people, '*des boules puantes [ont] été jetées par quelques partisans du Parti Social Français disséminés dans la salle.*'⁵⁴⁶ He also noted that 500 demonstrators, mainly '*des membres du Parti Social Français et partisans du Front Lorrain*' gathered outside the meeting hall singing the *Marseillaise* and shouting '*Vive de la Rocque!*' and '*Thorez à Moscou!*'

The significance of these events on the Parti Social Français was twofold. Firstly, they demonstrated the party's determination to fight the Communists' influence and its leadership in the anti 'red' campaign in the Moselle. Despite de la Rocque's repeated claims that his party was legalist, a local party official declared that should the Communists wish to conquer power –which some believed they did on 10 October - the Parti Social Français' role was to seize power illegally. As a *commissaire spécial* reported : '*Nous [le Parti Social Français] sommes disposés à prendre le pouvoir mais par la voie légale ... et par la voie illégale au cas où les Communistes voudraient s'en emparer.*'⁵⁴⁷

Secondly, the Parti Social Français seemed to have benefited from Blum's decision to authorise three meetings instead of the fifty-two originally planned and the ensuing disagreement between the PCF and the government. Ironically, while

⁵⁴⁵ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 11 octobre 1936, 301M79

⁵⁴⁶ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Boulay au préfet, 12 octobre 1936, 301M79.

⁵⁴⁷ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Thionville au préfet, 29 octobre 1936, 301M78.

the right and the far right in general gained a certain prestige after the Communist campaign, the unity of the Popular Front coalition appeared somewhat weakened. Ritz commented on the disagreement between the PCF and the government in the following terms, '*Leon Blum a résisté de son mieux à ses tristes alliés.... C'est le début de la cassure.*'⁵⁴⁸ As for the PCF, the Politburo published a manifesto that illustrated the mood of the party:

*La population laborieuse ... de Lorraine a été indignée que, se soumettant aux exigences des factieux, le gouvernement ait cru devoir interdire les meetings de propagande du Parti communiste, sous prétexte d'empêcher des troubles fascistes...*⁵⁴⁹

It is evident that de la Rocque's party succeeded in establishing itself as a strong political force and a credible anti-Communist organisation by the end of 1936. At a party meeting in Metz in November 1936, over 15,000 activists gathered and celebrated their leader and the party's feats against the Communists. But, while the party's active propaganda continued its conquest of the Mosellan middle classes, it was also eager to conquer the working masses.

The Syndicats Professionnels and the Christian trade unions

Another area where the Parti Social Français was particularly aggressive and successful was the social arena with the creation of its own trade union, the Syndicats Professionnels Français. The first Syndicats appeared in the Moselle in March 1936. Designed to unite white and blue collar workers in the same trade union, the local *patronat* supported their creation. Indeed, as the *préfet* noted, '*suscitées par les organisations Croix de Feu ... [ces créations] ont bénéficié ... de l'appui tacite, mais très actif, du patronat.*'⁵⁵⁰ The trade unions were organised in a similar fashion to the CGT with professional federations gathered in a *départemental* union that belonged to the national Confédération des Syndicats Professionnels Français. The *départemental* union was presided by Jacques

⁵⁴⁸ Ritz, *Le Lorrain*, 10 octobre 1936, p.1.

⁵⁴⁹ 'Déclaration du Bureau politique du Parti communiste', *L'Humanité*, 13 octobre 1936, p.2.

⁵⁵⁰ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 3 avril 1937, 310M97.

Sicard, an engineer from Metz, who devoted every afternoon to his trade union work. The Syndicats Professionnels had the support of the well-established networks and sections of the Croix de Feu and, after June 1936, those of the Parti Social Français’.

According to the *préfet*, the majority of the members were ‘*[des] ouvriers et employés sympathisants ou adhérents du “Parti Social Français” et aux mouvements de droite, comme le “Front Lorrain” et “l’Action Catholique Lorraine”*’.⁵⁵¹ A particularity of the Mosellan union was the desire of a certain number of its members to gain some independence from the Parti Social Français. As the *préfet* noted in the same report, ‘*une certaine tendance se manifesterait au sein de la Fédération départementale, en vue de la dégager de l’obédience directe du “Parti Social Français”*’. While it is unclear why some members of the local Syndicats Professionnels sought to remove themselves from the party’s authority, it is possible that they hoped to hide their association with a party which locally competed directly with the notables and the Front Lorrain. It is also possible that some members of the Mosellan union had a different agenda and rejected de la Rocque’s tolerance towards Jews and particular French Jewish veterans.

Though Richard Millman’s claim that the Moselle was one of the most antisemitic regions in 1930s France is debatable, antisemitism among supporters of the *départemental* section of the Parti Social Français was not uncommon.⁵⁵² Millman quotes the words of local followers of the Parti Social Français who highlighted the dual and not mutually exclusive dangers of Judaism and Communism. Quoting a police report, he observes, ‘*dans le département de la Moselle, vers la fin de l’année 1936, un orateur du mouvement dénonce la politique du Front Populaire qui ... est influencée par « Staline et les juifs internationaux »*’.⁵⁵³ Another follower affirmed, ‘*« C’est Léon Blum ou le juif Staline qui commande chez nous. »*’⁵⁵⁴ In his study on fascism in interwar Alsace, Goodfellow has demonstrated the indisputable contamination of the Alsatian

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵² Millman, *op.cit.*, pp.261-262.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid*, p.263

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

sections of the Parti Social Français with the viruses of Nazism and antisemitism. But despite the evidence presented by Millman, there is no evidence to suggest that the Mosellan federation of the party and the union of the Syndicats Professionnels suffered a similar fate. Though there is no doubt that some Mosellan supporters of the Parti Social Français were antisemitic (the exact numbers will probably remain unknown), this does not mean that the whole federation rejected Judaism. However commendable Millman's study of *la question juive* is, one should exercise caution when reading his interpretation of events in Alsace and the Moselle. Indeed, the author's failure to differentiate the three Parti Social Français federations (Moselle, Bas-Rhin and Haut-Rhin) and his reference to a political entity that never existed ('le Parti Social Français d'Alsace-Lorraine') reflects the trend among historians which, until recently, inaccurately represented interwar Moselle a natural extension of Alsace. The Parti Social Français in the Moselle was attached to another federation in 1937, but it was that of neighbouring Meurthe-et-Moselle not those of Alsace.

All the same, echoing the Parti Social Français's dislike of Communism, the trade union's fundamental mission was, in the *préfet's* words, '*de combattre l'influence des organisations cégétistes dont [elle rallie] tous les adversaires.*'⁵⁵⁵ Following the strike movement of the summer of 1936, the Syndicats Profesionnels actively intensified their propaganda campaigns and succeeded in recruiting thousands of supporters. By April 1937, the *préfet* estimated their numbers at approximately 2,500, mainly in and around Metz; exactly where the CGT and the PCF were the weakest.⁵⁵⁶ The Syndicats were particularly successful among the female workforce (the Syndicat des gens de maison for example) and in small businesses. Even though they managed to create forty-seven new trade unions by the end of 1936, they failed to secure the support of the industrial

⁵⁵⁵ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 3 avril 1937, 310M97.

⁵⁵⁶ ADM, 'Rapport d'ensemble sur le fonctionnement des syndicats professionnels', Metz, nd, 26Z3.

workers who followed the CGT or the rival Christian trade unions in their thousands.⁵⁵⁷

The Catholic Syndicats Indépendants d'Alsace-Lorraine, backed by the diocese and the Union Républicaine Lorraine, opposed the strikes of the summer of 1936. Although they agreed with some of the workers' demands, they rejected the occupations. According to a police report, Braun, one of the leaders of the trade union, warned his colleagues to refrain from following what the author of the report described as '*une masse d'ouvriers imprégnés d'idées révolutionnaires*'.⁵⁵⁸ After the strikes, as both the Parti Social Français' Syndicats Professionnels and the CGT competed to recruit new members, the Christian union felt compelled to react. In order to re-affirm its Christian heritage among Catholic workers who might be tempted to join the Syndicats Professionnels, the trade union changed its name from Unabhängiger Gewerkschaftsbund (UGB) to Christlicher Gewerkschaftsbund (CGB); Independent Trade Union to Christian Trade Union. As the CGT sought to capitalise on the strike movement, claiming it was the only organisation capable of uniting and representing the workers effectively, the left-wing trade union and the CGB clashed in what was to become a long conflict.

Backed by the Action Catholique Lorraine and many right-wing politicians, the Catholic trade union's regional secretary-general, Henri Meck, and five deputies co-wrote a letter to the *préfet*. In it, they complained of '*la prétention [de la CGT] d'être l'unique organisation ouvrière ... depuis le début du mouvement revendicatif qui a suivi l'accord dit "de Matignon"*'.⁵⁵⁹ Above all, they wrote the letter in order to complain about the CGT's threatening tactics against some members of the Catholic trade union. As they wrote,

nous avons l'honneur de vous prier de vouloir bien intervenir énergiquement auprès ... de la CGT, pour mettre fin aux cas de

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁸ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au sous-préfet, Sarreguemines, 13 juin 1936, 26Z3.

⁵⁵⁹ ADBR, Lettre signée par les députés de la Moselle Schuman, Sérot, Harter, Moncelle, Heid et Meck, Secrétaire des Syndicats Indépendants et député du Bas-Rhin, Paris, 1er juillet 1936, 98AL696.

pression et de terreur exercés par certains dirigeants locaux de la CGT sur les membres des Syndicats Chrétiens’.

Quoting a few examples of recent occurrences, they mentioned the case of Charles Leininger, a miner and a leading member of the Christian union in Moyeuve-Grande, who received death threats and of a few workers who were thrown out of their workplaces because they refused to leave their union and join the CGT. They concluded by mentioning the names of a few workers who were able to keep their jobs only because they resigned from the Christian union and joined the CGT.

In reaction to what many Catholics considered violent and unlawful methods, the clergy and the Action Catholique Lorraine organised meetings in support of the Christian union. During those meetings, priests, *abbés* and other clergymen strongly advised Catholic workers to join the Christian trade union. At a meeting in Boulay on 13 February 1937, Robert Godel, the local representative of the Action Catholique Lorraine, praised his organisation’s attention to the amelioration of the working masses’ future.⁵⁶⁰ He explained that because of that the Action Catholique Lorraine naturally supported the Christian trade union. At the end of the meeting, archpriest Collignon and *abbé* Schweitzer encouraged workers in French and in German to join the Christian trade union. In another meeting organised by the Action Catholique Lorraine, Paul Harter, the deputy-mayor of Forbach, asked workers to, in the *préfet*’s words, ‘*se désolidariser de la CGT et à donner [leur] adhésion au syndicat chrétien.*’⁵⁶¹ The Action Catholique Lorraine organised similar meetings across the *département*, in French as well as German- and Platt-speaking cantons. To be sure, the Action Catholique Lorraine’s efforts denote the fear many Catholics felt before the scale of the strike movement and the rise and radicalisation of the CGT. Above all, like the majority of right wingers many Catholics believed that France was on the brink of a revolution that would see the uprising of the proletariat and to the killings of priests and nuns;

⁵⁶⁰ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Boulay au préfet, 14 février 1937, 98AL675.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*

crimes the 'reds' were allegedly committing in Spain where the revolution had, so they thought, already started.

Part Two: the Left's Divisions

The Spanish Civil War

On 18 June 1936, Spanish military rebels launched a coup against the Popular Front government, which had won the elections in Spain in February.⁵⁶² The conspirators, who sought to overthrow the Republic and establish a military dictatorship in its place, counted on a swift victory. But as Paul Preston writes, '[w]hat was supposed to be a quick coup left Spain geographically and politically divided for a lengthy war.'⁵⁶³ The conflict, which ended three years later with the rebels' victory, saw the confrontation of two ideologically-opposed groups: on the right, General Francisco Franco's Nationalists; on the left, the Loyalists or Republicans. Broadly speaking, the first group comprised Spain's elites such as land and business owners, Catholic small landowners, the clergy and the army, and the second included landless labourers, industrial workers, supporters of the left and the trade unions and Republicans. Shortly after the military uprising, the new Spanish Premier José Giral appealed to Blum for French military assistance. Initially Blum agreed to send military equipment to the Spanish Republic. But following talks with his own government and British representatives, and facing pressure from the Radical-Socialist party, the Senate and the right-wing press, which accused him of fomenting a war against Italy and Germany, Blum refused to help the sister regime in Spain. Instead, France signed a non-intervention pact that imposed among other things an arms embargo on Spain. However, when it became apparent that two of the pact co-signatories, Italy and Germany, were flouting the agreement by providing the Nationalists with essential military

⁵⁶² For further reading on the Spanish Civil War, see Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, London: Fontana Press, 1996.

⁵⁶³ Paul Preston, 'Spanish Civil War, Right Versus Left in the 1930s', *Modern History Review*, 3,1, September 1991, p.5.

equipment and troops, France turned a blind eye to illegal arms shipments across its southern border.

The Spanish Civil War is doubly interesting to this study on account of its effect on the Popular Front coalition and its exploitation by the right and the far right against the Popular Front and the Communists. In August 1936, after Blum had officially agreed to a policy of non-intervention, the PCF became the de facto defender of the Spanish Republic in France. Both contemporary observers and historians agree that the Spanish war revealed profound divisions within the governing coalition as well as within its constituent parties. In his memoirs, Depreux stated that *'la guerre d'Espagne avait profondément divisé le gouvernement'*,⁵⁶⁴ to which Wolikow adds *'[l]a question espagnole a profondément ébranlé le Front populaire dans la mesure où elle a ravivé les dissensions entre les partis de gauche et brisé sa dynamique unitaire.'*⁵⁶⁵ The PCF position was unequivocal. It flatly rejected the government's policy of non-intervention and the arms embargo. In a letter to the SFIO, the Communist party voiced its indignation before what it considered an injustice: *'C'est une chose véritablement intolérable que de voir les rebelles ravitaillés par l'Italie et l'Allemagne, tandis que le gouvernement légal se voit appliquer une politique de blocus'*.⁵⁶⁶ Before what Thorez later described as *'une sinistre duperie'* and *'une véritable trahison de la démocratie, de l'Espagne républicaine et de la France'*, the PCF began to organise fund collections and convoys of voluntary fighters for Spain in September 1936.⁵⁶⁷

The positions of the Radicals and the SFIO were not as clear as that of the PCF. Within the Radical party, two opposing groups emerged: the pro-interventionists led by Pierre Cot, the Air Minister, and the non-interventionists led by Yvon Delbos, Minister for Foreign Affairs, who represented the majority within

⁵⁶⁴ Depreux, *op.cit.*, p.107.

⁵⁶⁵ Wolikow, *op.cit.*, p.217.

⁵⁶⁶ Le Secrétariat du Parti communiste, 'Pour le soutien du peuple d'Espagne, Une lettre du Parti Communiste à la C.A.P. du Parti Socialiste', *Les Cahiers du Bolchévisme*, 14-15, 25 août 1936, p.999.

⁵⁶⁷ Thorez, *Fils du Peuple*, p.140.

the party. As for the SFIO, it was equally divided: while the majority supported Blum's policy, others such as Vincent Auriol, Finance Minister, and Zyromski contested it. The latter even created a committee in support of the Spanish Republic, the Comité d'Action Socialiste pour l'Espagne. It is clear that those differences deepened the rift within the coalition parties and the coalition itself, notably between the government and the PCF. During a speech he gave at the National Assembly in December 1936, Thorez declared: '*Nous demandons instamment au gouvernement ... d'écartier de lui et de nous le plus grand risque de dissociation du Front populaire.*' But Blum defended his policy consistently by arguing that, as Julian Jackson puts it, 'it prevented the escalation of the Spanish conflict into an international war'.⁵⁶⁸ Blum's refusal to yield to the PCF's calls to end the embargo led the Communist deputies to abstain from voting for the government's foreign policy on 5 December 1936. This prompted the right-wing *Le Figaro* to declare, '*Le Front populaire est virtuellement rompu.*'⁵⁶⁹

By and large, the right favoured a policy of neutrality towards the Spanish War. Both the Fédération Républicaine and the Alliance Démocratique opposed intervention. The former, as Irvine suggests, did so for two main reasons: 1) because it believed that helping the Spanish Republic would lead to a war with Germany, and 2) because of its antipathy to the Spanish Popular Front which Octave Lavalette, the propaganda delegate for the Rhône federation, described as the embodiment of 'Communist brutality and the tyranny of Moscow'.⁵⁷⁰ Regarding the attitude of the Alliance Démocratique, François Audigier writes that, '*les députés refusèrent toute ingérence dans la guerre d'Espagne*',⁵⁷¹ possibly because of the party's '*culture politique qui privilégiait par principe le compromis au conflit.*'⁵⁷² The position of the Catholic Parti Démocrate Populaire was somewhat less obvious. Although the party officially supported non-intervention,

⁵⁶⁸ Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, p.206.

⁵⁶⁹ Quoted in Grandmougin, *Histoire Vivante du Front Populaire*, p.290.

⁵⁷⁰ Irvine, *op.cit.*, p.173

⁵⁷¹ François Audigier, 'Les Modérés face au Front Populaire: Les Ambiguïtés de l'Alliance Démocratique', *Les Annales de l'Est*, 2, 1997, p.340.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, p.343.

some, such as Jean Raymond-Laurent, the co-founder and secretary-general of the party, denounced the involvement of Germany and Italy on the Nationalists' side and were sympathetic to the Republican cause.⁵⁷³

On the far right, all parties opposed French intervention in Spain principally because they thought it would increase the chances of provoking a war with Germany. Regarding the Parti Social Français, Soucy writes that the party 'not only opposed French intervention in Spain to save its new Republic but also denounced calls for France to go to war against Nazi Germany'.⁵⁷⁴ At the head of his new Parti Populaire Français, Doriot claimed that France should not intervene in a foreign conflict that had been secretly plotted by the Soviet Union in order to start a war between France and Germany. He also strongly criticised the PCF's organisation and recruitment of the International Brigades - military units formed of French and foreign antifascist volunteers who fought for the Republic in Spain between 1936 and 1939.⁵⁷⁵

For Doriot and many on the right and far right, the PCF's involvement in the Spanish conflict conveniently confirmed what they had repeatedly preached since the victory of the Popular Front: '*le communisme, c'est la guerre*'. As the party whose raison d'être rested on anti-Communism, the Parti Populaire Français was particularly involved in the action against the PCF's recruitment of volunteers. According to the party's newspaper, *L'Emancipation Nationale*, '*[le Parti Populaire Français a] agi pour faire cesser la traite des blancs à laquelle se livrait le parti communiste. [Son] action a sauvé la vie de milliers de jeunes Français*'.⁵⁷⁶ It is worth noting that while the Parti Populaire Français and the other parties of the right and the far right consistently denounced the PCF's involvement in Spain they tended to pass over in silence that of Germany and Italy.

⁵⁷³ Jean Raymond-Laurent was a member of the delegation of French deputies who visited Catalonia in late 1938.

⁵⁷⁴ Soucy, *French Fascism: the Second Wave*, p.117.

⁵⁷⁵ According to Rod Kedward, 25 percent of the 30,000-50,000 fighters within the International Brigades were French. In Kedward, *op.cit.*, p.207. M.W. Jackson estimates the number of foreign volunteers at 35,000 among whom 25 percent were French. In M.W. Jackson, 'The Army of Strangers: the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 32, 1, April 1986, p.106.

⁵⁷⁶ Jean-Paul Brunet, *Jacques Doriot, du communisme au fascisme*, Paris: Balland, 1986, p.286.

One of the most notable effects of the Spanish war in France was its effect upon the right. As Osgood correctly notes, 'The impact of the Spanish Civil War on the French right cannot be exaggerated. For here was living proof ... of the logical and inevitable outcome of the Popular Front experiments.'⁵⁷⁷ Indeed, the Spanish events confirmed the conservatives' worst fears of revolution and war. By publicising the Republicans' desecration of churches and the murders of priests and nuns to its conservative readers, the French right-wing press played an important role in alarming public opinion and politicians. Occurring just when France faced a social upheaval that heralded fundamental changes to the traditional conservative values of order, respect, social hierarchy and so on, the Spanish Civil War confronted right wingers with what appeared to be a stark choice: either to assist the Spanish left-wing government with the help of the Soviet Union but risk a civil war at home and a war with Germany, or to abandon Spain to its fate, let Germany put an end to the Popular Front Republic, restore order in France and save peace in Europe. Not surprisingly, the vast majority opted for the second choice. Even though one must not ignore the real pacifism that existed among right wingers at the time, it is clear that ideology played a decisive role in the right's perception of events. As Osgood puts it, the French right perceived the events in Spain as a simple contest between "anti-Communist and pro-Communist forces."⁵⁷⁸

In the Moselle, the divisions within the left-wing coalition and the parties appeared somewhat similar to those observed at the national level. Although little is known of the local Radicals' position, many Socialists such as Ralph Konopnicki openly contested Blum's policy. Konopnicki became heavily involved in the collection of funds for the Spanish Republic. Alongside members of the PCF, the CGT and the Secours Rouge International, he organised the tour of a Republican Catalan music band, Cobla Barcelona, in the summer of 1937. The latter played concerts all over the *département* in order to raise awareness and funds for the Republican cause. The first concert, which took place in Metz, attracted a large

⁵⁷⁷ Osgood, *op.cit.*, p.194

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.195.

crowd of supporters as well as the attention of the far right. As Pierre Schill writes, '*[l]e premier concert organisé à Metz attire une foule nombreuse parmi laquelle des militants d'extrême droite qui lancent des boules puantes*'.⁵⁷⁹

As at the national level, the Mosellan Communists disagreed with Blum's policy in Spain. Despite the claim that they wholly supported the Popular Front government and coalition, local Communists displayed certain signs of frustration towards Blum and his government. At a party meeting at the Palais de Cristal in Metz in August 1936, local Communist officials claimed that '*A l'heure actuelle, le Parti Communiste soutient sans restriction le Gouvernement*'.⁵⁸⁰ They blamed the right for trying to split the coalition over the issues of Spain and declared, '*Le parti ... est vigilant et se gardera bien de provoquer une scission*.' But as events in Spain unfolded and Blum continued to resist the PCF's calls to lift the arms embargo on Spain, the Mosellan federation supported the Communist deputies' decision not to vote for the government's policy in the National Assembly.

Like the national Central Committee, it identified with the plight of the Spanish Popular Front. In its determination to help the sister regime, it played a decisive role in the pro-Republican campaign. Along with the CGT, Mosellan Communists organised regular meetings in support of the Spanish Republic. They also collected food, clothes and funds and became particularly involved in the organisation of the International Brigades. During one of the collection campaigns in the industrial canton of the Vallée de l'Orne the *préfet* reported that '*le Parti Communiste a organisé ... des équipes de quêtisseurs qui visitent les particuliers et sollicitent des subventions pour les Républicains espagnols*'.⁵⁸¹ They also organised regular collections among industrial workers. According to the metalworkers' CGT-sponsored newspaper *Le Métallurgiste*, fund collectors gathered almost 30,000 francs in the steelworks around Thionville by the end of September 1936.⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁹ Schill, *Visages et Figures du Front Populaire en Moselle*, p.47.

⁵⁸⁰ ADM, Rapport du commissaire de police Jacquin, Metz, 31 août 1936, 301M78.

⁵⁸¹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 20 février 1937, 98AL689.

⁵⁸² *Le Métallurgiste*, p.5.

Regarding the International Brigades, the Moselle played a particularly active role in the recruitment and transit of the volunteers. According to Rémi Skoutelsky, of all France's *départements*, the Moselle ranked fourth in the provision of volunteers for the Brigades.⁵⁸³ As he writes, '*La région parisienne est ... le lieu de résidence de près de la moitié des Brigadistes français [41,6%]. Le département provincial fournissant le plus fort contingent est ... le Nord : 5,8%. Il est suivi du Rhône (4,8%), de la Moselle (3,7%)*'. Numerous prefectural and police reports acknowledged the Moselle's significant role in the organisation of the Brigades. Although the Brigades were officially created on 22 October 1936, Mosellan Communists wasted no time in organising convoys of French and foreign volunteers for Spain. A few weeks after Franco's military uprising, Emile Cossoneau, the Communist deputy for the Seine-et-Oise, declared during one of his visits to the Moselle that '*la classe ouvrière française a le devoir de soutenir de tous ses efforts la République espagnole*'.⁵⁸⁴ Although Cossoneau did not explicitly urge workers to go to Spain to fight for the Republic, the *préfet* stated that '*le parti communiste avait lancé des appels pour que des volontaires, adhérant à ses cellules, se rendent en Espagne*'.⁵⁸⁵ As a result, '*une quinzaine de volontaires ... seraient partis, pour l'Espagne, dans le courant du mois d'Août*'.⁵⁸⁶ In October, the regional section of the PCF took control of the recruitment of volunteers and ran recruitment offices in three industrial towns: Hagondange, Thionville and Sarreguemines. Throughout 1937 and 1938, regular convoys of volunteers continued to leave the *département*.

Why did the Moselle participate in the recruitment of volunteers? According to Skoutelsky, various social, economic and political factors may explain the Brigades' geographical origins in France. Firstly, the regions that provided the largest numbers of volunteers tended to be heavily industrialised and urbanised.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸³ Rémi Skoutelsky, *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas: les Volontaires Français dans les Brigades Internationales, 1936-1939*, Paris: Grasset, 1998, p.149.

⁵⁸⁴ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 31 août 1936, 301M78.

⁵⁸⁵ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 20 septembre 1936, 98AL689.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁷ Skoutelsky, *op.cit.*, p.151.

Secondly, the largest contingents left from areas where the PCF had a strong presence.⁵⁸⁸ As this thesis has demonstrated, however, the Moselle was no ordinary industrial region. Hence, Skoutelsky's affirmations, though possibly valid for other regions, do not apply well to the Moselle. After all, the *département's* working-class population had demonstrated its immunity to left-wing political and social activism for the largest part of the interwar period. This immunity had largely contributed to the PCF's poor implantation in the region. Could a different factor, such as the strikes of the summer of 1936, have instilled the *département* with a new political and social consciousness? Though the strikes did contribute to the formation of the workers' new social and political identity, the main explanation of the active participation of the Moselle in the Brigades may well have been its position on France's north-eastern borders.

As one of the largest centres in Europe for the recruitment of volunteers, the central offices of the PCF in Paris attracted many European antifascists. Indeed, as Stéphane Courtois and Marc Lazar note in their study of the PCF, '*Paris devient la plaque tournante où arrivent et sont « vérifiés » des milliers de volontaires ... avant d'être expédiés vers la frontière espagnole.*'⁵⁸⁹ It appears therefore that a large number of Central and East European Communists, on their way to Paris, used the Moselle as their point of entry into French territory: mainly Germans and Poles but also Czechoslovaks, Luxembourgers, Belgians, Russians and Bulgarians. Although it has not been possible to verify this claim, it is also probable that a certain number of Italian antifascist immigrants who came to the *département* after Mussolini rose to power may have joined some convoys. The presence of foreign fighters in the region alarmed the *préfet* who decided to take action. Indeed, faced with what the *préfet* described as '*le flux incessant de combattants étrangers qui partent pour l'Espagne*', he urged the Minister of the Interior to grant him the right to expel all foreigners from the *département* in order

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.152.

⁵⁸⁹ Stéphane Courtois et Marc Lazar, *Histoire du Parti communiste français*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000, p.153. The authors note that Paris also hosted the offices of France-Navigation, a phantom company created by the Soviet Union to transport secret military equipment to Spain.

to set an example.⁵⁹⁰ It is clear that the government did not consent to the *préfet's* request.⁵⁹¹

According to a *commissaire de police*, foreign Communists fleeing their home countries had long used the Moselle as a gateway to France. As he wrote in a report,

*Le passage par Metz, de nombreux Communistes étrangers ... principalement de nationalité allemande qui, fuyant leur pays, se rendent à Paris, existe depuis de nombreuses années, en particulier depuis l'avènement de Hitler.*⁵⁹²

Those foreign Communists and later the volunteers for Spain were able to enter France through two particularly poorly guarded areas of the *département's* borders: near Hettange-Grande on the Luxembourg side and near Forbach on the German side. Once in the Moselle, they were looked after by local Communists and the head of the local committee of the Secours Rouge International, Guillaume Klein. Then, they boarded trains to Paris-Gare de l'Est where Communist officials would greet them and take them to the PCF's offices on rue Lafayette. Finally, Parisian Communists provided them with false French identification documents that would enable them to cross the Spanish border. Whereas very few volunteers travelling from Metz to Paris were native Mosellans, the new recruits' documents often indicated the Moselle as their place of origin in France. This points to the Moselle's geographical location as the main factor in the *département* role in the transfer of foreign volunteers to Paris.

To be sure, the role of native Mosellan fighters should not be ignored, as some indisputably originated from the *département*. But since so many foreigners with no fixed address or without national papers happened to specify 'Moselle' as their place of residence in the administrative documents of the Brigades, it is difficult to evaluate the real number of Mosellan fighters. The *préfet* seemed to have felt this difficulty as he argued that the presence of so many foreign

⁵⁹⁰ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 1er décembre 1936, 98AL689.

⁵⁹¹ In 1939, however, the Ministry of the Interior partially heeded to the *préfet's* calls and banned Spanish refugees from settling in the Moselle.

⁵⁹² ADBR, Rapport du commissaire de police spécial Gare Centrale Metz au préfet, 4 novembre 1936, 98AL689.

antifascists travelling through the Moselle made the task of identifying the volunteers particularly difficult. As he wrote in a report in December 1936, '*L'effectif global de la Moselle est 319 recrues plus 150 à 200 enrôlés dont l'identification est imprécise.*'⁵⁹³ Interestingly, neighbouring Alsace, which was also conveniently located for the recruitment of foreign volunteers and whose borders with Germany exceeded that of the Moselle, provided fewer fighters than the latter. Skoutelsky estimates that between 1 and 1.9 percent of the fighters recruited in France originated or transited via Alsace; half the percentage of the Moselle.⁵⁹⁴ Too little is known of the Alsatian Communist federation and its role with regard to the Spanish war to advance any hypothesis, but it is likely that the Moselle's history as a chosen land of immigration played a certain part. Another factor that might have contributed to the Moselle's active part was the local Communists' sheer commitment and determination to help the Spanish Republic.

On the right, the Mosellans' attitude echoed that observed at the national level. As organisations that claimed to defend the interests of Catholics and the Church, the Union Républicaine Lorraine, the Front Lorrain and the Action Catholique Lorraine strongly opposed intervention. They were particularly sensitive to the right-wing press reports of the Communists' alleged crimes against the Spanish Catholic clergy, which they widely condemned. Following a meeting of the Action Catholique Lorraine in Sarreguemines, the local section published a resolution that read,

*Les membres de l'Action Catholique Populaire Lorraine expriment leur profonde sympathie à tous leurs frères victimes des crimes sacrilèges, commis par les attaques bolchévistes en Espagne, contre la vieille civilisation chrétienne...*⁵⁹⁵

In *Le Lorrain*, Ritz regularly reminded his readers that the duty of all Catholics was to defend Christianity against the hordes of Communist murderers, thus suggesting the moral authority of the Nationalists' cause. Schuman's pacifist and Catholic values led him naturally on the path of non-intervention. The leaders of

⁵⁹³ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 21 décembre 1936, 98AL689.

⁵⁹⁴ Skoutelsky, *op.cit.*, p.150.

⁵⁹⁵ AN, 'Résolution de l'Action Catholique Lorraine, canton de Sarreguemines', nd, F7/14614.

the Parti Social Français' regional federation endorsed de la Rocque's policy of neutrality. As Andres stated in a party meeting in Metz: '*Les membres de la fédération départementale du Parti Social Français ... [r]éclament ... une neutralité absolue en ce qui concerne la politique intérieure des pays voisins.*'⁵⁹⁶

By exposing the fragility of the political consensus on which the Popular Front rested, the Spanish Civil War revealed real divisions which cut across the constitutive parties, the coalition and the government. Although those who disagreed with the government's non-intervention policy never openly challenged Blum's leadership, they contested a policy that proved advantageous to the Nationalists, who greatly benefited from German and Italian military assistance. On the right and far right, a large majority supported neutrality. Thus, while the Spanish War divided the left, it appeared that it united a hitherto divided right. At the *départemental* level, the Spanish conflict revealed the PCF's organisational skills and a certain political maturity. By embracing the cause of the Spanish Republic and successfully organising the convoys of hundreds of volunteers, the federation appeared to have moved away from the difficulties and the internal crises that had characterised it during the formative years of the Popular Front. Although some SFIO activists such as Konopnicki were heavily involved in the pro-Republican campaign, a lack of sources makes it extremely difficult to assess the reaction and position of the Mosellan Socialist and Radical parties. But something which has not been addressed yet in this study, and which would have long lasting consequences on the French and Mosellan left, was the PCF's conquest of the CGT leadership from the *ex-confédérés*.

The Conquest of the CGT and the Trotskyites

In his history of the CGT in the late 1930s, Jules Chazoff, a leading figure of the French anarchist movement, wrote:

⁵⁹⁶ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 5 août 1936, 98AL674-1.

*Ce n'est un secret pour personne que depuis le Congrès de Toulouse, en mars 1936 ... le parti communiste n'a cessé de placer ses créatures à tous les postes dirigeants [de la CGT].*⁵⁹⁷

According to him, the ex-CGTU leaders worked consistently at bolshevising the unified CGT in order to, as he put it, '*exploiter les « masses » de travailleurs qui dans le passé ... avaient refusé de se rallier au parti communiste.*'⁵⁹⁸ In his view, the most notable illustration of the CGT's loss of independence was the Parisian union, which in his own words, '*est entièrement sous l'obédience du parti communiste.*'⁵⁹⁹ By and large, historians share Chazoff's views on the Communist conquest of the CGT. Lazar and Courtois note that, '*Nombre de documents prouvent l'intérêt essentiel que le PCF porte à sa pénétration dans la CGT et au contrôle de ses syndicalistes.*'⁶⁰⁰ The two historians believe that the PCF effectively controlled the CGT in 1937 when it commanded 2.6 million members; its opponents, the *non-unitaires*, counted roughly 1.6 million members. It also controlled the majority of unions and federations including the majority of industrial federations and the *départemental* union of the Moselle.⁶⁰¹

This is particularly interesting as at the height of its success in mid-1937 the Mosellan CGT counted roughly 80,000 members: almost 50 percent of the industrial workforce and 30 percent of the total workforce. The new influence of the CGT was most visible in the recrudescence of social unrest that affected many Mosellan industries and businesses. Indeed, despite the Matignon Agreements and the ensuing collective contracts, large strikes again took place in 1937. To name but a few: 900 ceramic workers in Sarreguemines in January,⁶⁰² 1,500 miners at the Terres-Rouges mines near Algrange and Audun-leTiche and 300 at

⁵⁹⁷ J. Chazoff, *La CGT, Colonie Soviétique*, Paris: Editions de France, 1939, p.ii.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.80.

⁵⁹⁹ The Parisian federation of metalworkers were particularly close to the PCF and they played an active role in the pro-Spanish Republic campaign. According to Duclos, the federation published a manifesto that condemned the arms embargo on Spain and organised '*l'organisation d'un départ de métallurgistes volontaires pour l'Espagne.*' In Jacques Duclos, *Mémoires, 1935-1939*, Paris: Fayard, 1969, p.191.

⁶⁰⁰ Lazar and Courtois, *op.cit.*, p.163.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid*. The authors write that '*sur 108 délégués de la métallurgie pour le congrès [de la CGT à Nantes en novembre 1938], 102 sont communistes.*'

⁶⁰² ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre du Travail, Metz, 5 mars 1937, 310M68.

the de Wendel steelworks in Hayange in August⁶⁰³. But as 1937 drew to an end, there was a sharp decline in the number of large strikes in the *département*. The most noticeable example was that witnessed at the Houillères de Wendel in Petite-Rosselle where on two separate occasions workers went on strike for the same reason: to defend a worker who had been involved in an altercation with a supervisor. On 27 April, 10,000 workers went on strike,⁶⁰⁴ they were 400 on 13 November.⁶⁰⁵

This episode is telling of what was occurring throughout the *département*: a certain disillusionment among workers towards left-wing political activism leading to a stagnation of the CGT membership in 1937. One particular factor that might also explain the CGT's loss of prestige was the fundamental differences that opposed the old CGT leaders with the newly-recruited younger leaders, who the *préfet* described as '*dépourvus de traditions syndicales*.'⁶⁰⁶ While the former favoured negotiations first and strikes second, the latter, who had been hastily recruited to help the CGT cope with its fast-growing numbers, often lacked discipline. It often employed strike action and other radical means to achieve what appeared as politically-driven goals that had little to do with the workforce's legitimate interests and welfare. At the Bata shoe-manufacturing plant in Hellocourt (known today as Maizieres-lès-Vic), management dismissed 227 workers who, exasperated at their co-workers' lack of support in a spontaneous strike (roughly 90 percent refused to join the movement), had cut the water supply to the industrial workshops and homes in Bataville, the neighbouring *cité ouvrière* built by the company.⁶⁰⁷ Conscious of the damaging consequences the affair had on the image of his union and keen to re-assert his authority, the secretary-general of the *départementale* CGT issued a note urging all local section leaders to put a halt to spontaneous strikes.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰³ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre du Travail, Metz, 6 septembre 1937, 310M68.

⁶⁰⁴ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 24 mai 1937, 98AL634.

⁶⁰⁵ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre du Travail, Metz, 4 décembre 1937, 310M68.

⁶⁰⁶ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 24 mai 1937, 98AL634.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

It is not known how his note affected the development of strikes in the Moselle, but police records show only two strikes in 1938. The first one, which occurred at Hagondange's Société des Aciers Fins de l'Est on 24 February, lasted forty-five minutes. The second was the nation-wide strike of 30 November, which shall be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Even the lengthy and difficult negotiations between the *patronat* and the CGT over the collective contracts of steelwork companies ended with negotiations and without a strike. It is interesting to note that the drop in 1938 coincided with the culmination of the internal struggle over the control of the CGT as well as the fall of the PCF's prestige and the rise of a hitherto dormant party, the SFIO.

A *commissaire spécial* from Metz noted that during a meeting of the Metz section of the PCF, Anstett declared, '*L'activité du parti communiste doit ... être poussée activement sous l'étiquette du Front Populaire, mais dans l'esprit du parti communiste*'.⁶⁰⁹ As the other constituent parties of the Mosellan Popular Front were nearly insignificant in terms of officials and voting base, they represented little threat to the hegemony of the PCF within the coalition. The CGT, however, was different. With almost 80,000 members, it represented a sizeable gain for the PCF. As a first step towards the colonisation of the trade union, many Communists believed that their party's regional offices should move from Hagondange to rue Lafayette in Metz as the street also hosted the offices of the CGT. By moving closer to the trade unions' offices, some Communists believed that they would be able to control the CGT activities more closely. While the party rank and file seemed to favour this option, the secretary-general of the *départemental* federation of the PCF, Anstett, was keen to keep the party's regional headquarters close to where he lived and under his sole control.

In late 1936, the *ex-Unifiés*' attempts to control the CGT intensified. Following the steelworks federation's request for an extraordinary congress, all the local union officials met on 22 November. It appeared that those who had called for the congress had some hidden political agenda. Indeed, by questioning Rieth,

⁶⁰⁹ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 23 décembre 1936, 301M78.

the current regional secretary-general, on his attitude during the recent talks with the *patronat*, the *ex-Unifiés* deliberately tried to topple him. As an *ex-Confédéré*, Rieth had headed the trade union since its reunification in January 1936. During the congress, they repeatedly criticised him and accused him, in the *préfet's* words, '*de tiédeur et d'avoir déployé dans tous les pourparlers bipartites qui se sont écoulés lors des récents conflits sociaux un large esprit de conciliation.*'⁶¹⁰ By portraying Rieth as a person who lacked the necessary skills to lead the trade union and negotiate with the *patronat*, the *ex-Unifiés* hoped to create a crisis that would lead to the election of a new leader. As their numbers exceeded those of the *ex-Confédérés*, they counted on an easy victory for one of their party. As the Communist trade unionists continued their attacks on Rieth, an apparent fracture split the CGT into two opposing groups: the Communist-backed *ex-Unifiés* on the one side and the *ex-Confédérés* on the other.

At the head of the first were a group of local Communists and ex-CGTU leaders: Schwob, Friedrich, Knecht and Waroqui. At the head of the second were trade unionists Kirsch, Jobard and Billes. During the extraordinary congress of 22 November, as the two rival parties were unable to agree on Rieth's leadership, Simon, the Communist mayor of Saint-Julien-lès-Metz, suggested the creation of a commission whose task would be to decide if Rieth should remain in his position or if the union should elect a new secretary-general. Even though the commission confirmed Rieth in his position, the disagreement between the two parties continued. By the end of December and less than one year since the unification of the CGT and the CGTU, the *ex-Unifiés* challenged openly the trade union's leadership and returned to what the *préfet* described as '*[des] méthodes franchement révolutionnaires de l'action directe.*'⁶¹¹ In another report, he affirmed that the PCF was responsible for the *ex-Unifiés'* attempts to control the CGT. As he noted:

Lorsque l'on constate que [l]es adversaires se recrutent tous parmi les militants les plus actifs du Parti communiste, on ne peut se

⁶¹⁰ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 24 novembre 1936, 98AL696.

⁶¹¹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 24 décembre 1936, 98AL696.

*retenir de conclure que leur action ... paraît répondre à une doctrine générale tendant à l'obédience totale et définitive de la Confédération Générale du Travail à l'autorité de ce parti.*⁶¹²

The CGT leaders were aware of Communist attempts to control the trade union. If truth be told, many trade unionists believed that the PCF had organised the 10 and 11 October Communist meetings in order to turn the workers away from the *ex-Confédérés* and capitalise on the success of the trade union. As the *préfet* wrote:

*Certains dirigeants du syndicalisme ne s'expliquent pas les motifs d'ordre corporatif qui peuvent justifier de telles manifestations ... si ce n'est le désir de faire échec ... à leur influence ... dans les milieux sidérurgiques ou miniers.*⁶¹³

With the recrudescence of the strikes in 1937 and the rising membership of the CGT, the PCF's attempt to control the trade union became even more hard-pressed. As Rieth lost his seat as regional secretary during the CGT's regional congress on 4 April 1937, the *ex-CGTU* activists seemed to have finally achieved what they had set out to do: take control of the Mosellan union and appoint one of their own at its head. But the new leader, Louis Nillès, was no Communist sympathiser. In actual fact, Nillès supported Rieth and the *ex-Confédérés* group within the unified CGT. What is more, he was a member of the SFIO. Does this mean that the *ex-Unitaires* failed in their attempts to take over the trade union?

According to the *préfet*, it was a partial victory only. As he wrote in a report : *'si [les éléments communistes] obtiennent satisfaction avec le départ de M. Rieth ... on ne pourrait dire que la nomination de M. Nillès soit pour eux un succès total.'*⁶¹⁴ He also noted that even though Nillès and Rieth were both *ex-Confédérés*, the former *'rencontre plus de sympathie et de confiance'* among industrial workers. The *préfet* explained Nillès' election by suggesting that the trade union's *départemental* administrative commission made sure the position went to an *ex-Confédéré*. This was made easy by the fact that the commission

⁶¹² AN, Rapport mensuel du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 24 novembre 1936, F7/13038.

⁶¹³ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 2 octobre 1936, 301M79.

⁶¹⁴ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 6 avril 1937, 98AL684-1.

comprised twenty-seven members, fourteen of whom were *ex-Confédérés* and thirteen *ex-Unitaires*. What is more, the *préfet* added, many among the thirteen *ex-Unitaires* disapproved of what he described as '*certaines outrances des militants ... du Parti Communiste.*' As this vote demonstrates, even Communists were wary of their own party's doings.

While the PCF's regional federation was busy trying to organise support for Spain and gain control of the CGT, it entered another crisis. The latter led to a rift between a radical wing and a moderate one. The fracture pertained to the Central Committee's directives, which instructed the regional cells not to recruit new members who might jeopardise the PCF's image as a moderate and national party. In the Moselle, this meant no Germans, Autonomists or Trotskyites should be allowed to join the party. Indeed, fearing the possible infiltration of Gestapo agents, the Central Committee banned the recruitment of any German. As the *préfet* noted, '

*il aurait été décidé que les adhésions de tous les Allemands, se présentant comme réfugiés politiques, seraient impitoyablement refusées. Cette mesure répondrait au souci d'éviter l'immixtion dans les cadres de la Gestapo.*⁶¹⁵

Similarly, '*le parti voudrait se débarrasser de l'aspect autonomisant qu'ont revêtus, pendant fort longtemps ... la propagande et ses méthodes*' since '*ces dernières seraient dirigées selon un esprit plus national*'.⁶¹⁶

As secretary-general of the *départementale* federation, Anstett conformed to the party's line. But Friedrich disagreed and argued that in order to increase the party's influence, the latter ought to consider allying with Trotsky's followers and should in fact offer them *la main tendue* as it had offered to the Catholics.⁶¹⁷ Even though the Trotskyites counted very few members in the *département*, many older and leading officials of the PCF supported Friedrich: Rubeck, the mayor of Mondelange, Rau, the mayor of Amnéville and Barbian, the ex-Mayor of

⁶¹⁵ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 7 septembre 1936, 301M78.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁷ ADM, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 17 novembre 1936, 301M78.

Rombas.⁶¹⁸ Sensing that the party might lose touch with some of the Mosellan sections loyal to Friedrich and his associates, the party decided to infiltrate the Trotskyite Association des Anciens Combattants Républicains. The latter had links to the Spanish Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM), the Spanish workers' revolutionary party which fought in the Spanish civil war and which Stalin would later seek to eliminate. Although the divisions affecting the Mosellan federation were real and indicative of the effect of international events on the unity of the party, the issue did not create a split. Nonetheless, it is clear that the federation was torn. As in the 1920s and early 1930s, it was torn between its obedience to the Central Committee and its particularist ways, which, this time, involved the party's inclusion of Catholics and exclusion of fellow revolutionaries.

Conclusion

Like the right's excesses in 1934 had led the left on the path of unity, so did the left's excesses and the accompanying social upheaval led right wingers to consider joint action. But unlike the parties of the left, which had succeeded in overcoming ideological and political differences, the right remained largely divided. Despite a common loathing of Communism and their public displays of unity against the 'reds', right wingers proved unable to set aside their differences largely because of political ambitions that included the conquest of the conservative masses for the next legislative elections. At the national level, groups who had initially formed as apolitical associations sought to create their own alliances to defeat Communism and therefore politicised. For example, the Union Nationale des Combattants launched the Rassemblement Français in July 1936. Designed to win the support of parties such as the Fédération Républicaine, the Parti Démocrate Populaire and the Parti Social Français, the Rassemblement Français sought to unite what Jean Goy, the president of the veterans' association, described as: *'tous les Français désireux de ne pas voir leur pays devenir une*

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*

colonie de Moscou.⁶¹⁹ This was not the right's first attempt at uniting, but the fact that the initiative came from a veterans' association reflected the deep crisis of the political right.⁶²⁰ Nor was it the last as a few months later Doriot attempted to unite France's conservative forces in his alliance known as the Front de la Liberté.

Similarly, relations between the various elements of the Mosellan right were far from harmonious. This was particularly true of the Parti Social Français, which considered the Front Lorrain as a useful yet suspicious ally. As for the Front Lorrain, it considered the hegemonic and exclusive ambitions of the Parti Social Français difficult to accept. As shall be demonstrated in the next chapter, tensions between the two right-wing organisations did not wane in 1937-1938. In fact, when the Popular Front government announced its plan to reform education in the recovered provinces, something which the population and the right had vigorously opposed in 1924, relations between the Parti Social Français and the Front Lorrain deteriorated even further.

On the left, the Spanish Civil War and the PCF's attempt to control the CGT challenged the unity of the Popular Front. In the Moselle, where the PCF continued to dominate the Popular Front *départemental* committee, the latter focused on helping the Spanish Republic. Thanks to its border position, its historical role as a land of immigration and the determination of local Communists, trade unionists and a few Socialists, the *département* played a central role in the transit of volunteers for Spain. As at the national level, local Communists also sought to control the CGT, thereby challenging the unity of the Popular Front. The local PCF's attempt to control the trade union and the workers' new political ambitions left many new CGT members disillusioned. As a result, confronted with the PCF's old sectarian ways, many decided to desert the CGT and the Communist party. As the next chapter will establish, these mass desertions largely contributed to the decline of the PCF and the Popular Front coalition as well as the

⁶¹⁹ AN, Marin papers, Lettre de Jean Goy à Louis Marin, Paris, 19 novembre 1936, 317AP72.

⁶²⁰ For an examination of the politicisation of the Union Nationale des Combattants in the period of the Popular Front see Christopher Millington, 'The French Veterans and the Republic: The Union Nationale des Combattants, 1933-1939', unpublished PhD thesis, Cardiff University, 2009, chapter Five.

rise of a hitherto small political party on the Mosellan political scene, the SFIO. Undoubtedly, *the* issue that ultimately accelerated the fall of the Popular Front and the right's return to power was Germany. In the Moselle, the prospect of another war with Germany, which took centre stage in 1937-1938, went beyond class and ideological differences and created much fear and anxiety among the local population. As the *préfet* wrote in a report,

*L'opinion publique ... suit ... avec une attention qui n'exclut pas l'anxiété l'activité diplomatique.... Elle a ... le sentiment que dans un avenir assez proche, des problèmes graves sont susceptibles de se poser et n'aperçoit pas clairement les solutions qui pourront leur être données.... [E]lle a la conviction que la complexité toujours plus accrue de la situation internationale ... est en grande partie la marque de l'intervention du troisième Reich, dont la politique audacieuse l'effraie a bon droit.*⁶²¹

⁶²¹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 25 décembre 1937, 98AL634.

Chapter Five - Domestic and International Challenges: the Return of the Right and the Fall of the Popular Front, February 1937- November 1938

Introduction

When Blum publicly announced a pause in social reforms in February 1937, reactions were felt on both sides of the political spectrum. On the left, some felt Blum betrayed the common programme and questioned their support for, or participation in, the Popular Front. On the right, many perceived Blum's announcement as a major ideological shift and a sign of the failure of the Popular Front policies. In March, the violent clashes that opposed left-wing protesters and police forces in Clichy, a Socialist town in the north of Paris, tested the unity of the Popular Front and gave some right wingers the impetus to unite in a coalition. On 22 June, when Blum resigned from his post at the head of the government, the Popular Front end appeared all but inevitable. Following two short-lived governments headed by the Radical-Socialist Chautemps and another by Blum, Daladier formed the fifth Popular Front government in April 1938. Daladier sealed the fate of the left-wing coalition by forsaking some of its most highly ideologically-charged social reforms. Instead, he unequivocally committed his government to restore social order and augment industrial production in order to prepare France morally, economically and militarily for a war against Germany. As he declared in May 1938: '*La Paix à l'intérieur condition de la Paix au dehors, voilà ce que nous voulons.*'⁶²²

Coincidentally, this sentence echoed Metz's official centennial motto: '*Si nous avons Paix dedans, nous avons Paix dehors*'. Peace in Metz and the Moselle was to be disturbed when the government decreed a new school reform. The reform, which dominated public debate in the Moselle until the fall of Blum's second government in June 1937, met with serious opposition within Mosellan

⁶²² CHSPo, Genebrier papers, 'Décrets-lois du 2 mai 1938, Déclaration sur la Stabilisation', 4 mai 1938, GE7.

Catholic circles, in particular those of the Action Catholique Lorraine and the Union Républicaine Lorraine. But *the* subject that preoccupied France and the Moselle in the final months of the Popular Front was the emergence of the German threat. Because the possibility of a war with the latter presaged another potential annexation, anxious Mosellans sought the protection of the only elite that had remained in the region during the last German occupation and which the population implicitly trusted, the Catholic clergy. Consequently, the Mosellan political character operated a shift away from the extremes towards the centre, both on the left and the right. On the left, while the SFIO saw its membership rise for the first time since the split of the party in 1921, the PCF appeared to lose its influence in some industrial centres. On the right, the rise of the Parti Social Français halted as the Union Républicaine Lorraine and the Action Catholique Lorraine became the favourites of the conservative masses.

By examining the domestic and international events that surrounded the fall of the Popular Front and the rise of the right, this chapter will seek to answer two main questions. Firstly, how did domestic events redefine the Mosellan political character? Secondly, how did the rising German threat affect Mosellan society and politics?

Part One: Radicalisation and Disunity

School reform and the Clichy riots

As established in the previous chapter, relations between Mosellan right-wing organisations, notwithstanding public displays of mutual support, were far from harmonious. The most noticeable example was the feud that opposed the Front Lorrain and the Parti Social Français. According to a prefectural report, the quarrels between the two movements began in the autumn of 1936. As the *préfet* wrote, '[le Parti Social Français] est contrarié dans son développement par l'action de « rassemblements » [ndlr the Front Lorrain] qui, tout en promettant leurs

*possibilités d'interpénétration, créent le doute dans l'esprit des sympathisants.*⁶²³

Despite publicly supporting the Front Lorrain, the Parti Social Français saw the formation of the Front as a threat to its ambition to dominate the right. This is hardly surprising since both organisations competed for the support of the same share of the electorate, namely the Catholic, conservative, middle-classes. When the government announced a decree on school reform, tensions between the two organisations intensified.

The decree of 10 August 1936 extended school leaving age by one additional year from thirteen to fourteen for all children in France. Because the education system in the recovered provinces differed – they combined laws from the French Second Empire with a few additions made during the period of the *Reichsland* - the decree did not apply in Alsace and the Moselle. There, local laws stipulated that girls should be educated between six and thirteen and boys between six and fourteen. Aware of this disparity, Blum's government published another decree on 10 October. It stipulated that the one-year prolongation should also apply to children in the three *départements*, thus extending the school leaving age to fourteen for girls and fifteen for boys. The fact that girls were required to stay at school for one additional year did not stir any particular reaction among the local population, but the extension for boys angered many, particularly on the Catholic right. Thus began a long battle between the government on the one side and local elected officials and right-wing parties and organisations on the other.

The Union Républicaine Lorraine deputies and senators, led by Schuman, became the most vocal opponents of the reform. Alongside their Alsatian counterparts, Mosellan right-wing parliamentarians challenged the legality of the decree in a letter to the government. Local elected officials from the Union Républicaine Lorraine who sat at the right-wing *Conseil Général de la Moselle* also condemned the decree. During the council's assembly on 19 November 1936, Ritz claimed that it penalised mainly large families who needed their children to work in order to supplement the family income. Foule, a *conseiller général*, developed

⁶²³ AN, Rapport mensuel du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 24 novembre 1936, F7/13038.

what the Perfect called *'un plan d'action d'ordre confessionnel en demandant à toutes les masses paysannes de soutenir leurs prêtres et leurs curés et de se conformer strictement dans le domaine politique à leurs directives.'*⁶²⁴

The Action Catholique Lorraine was less confrontational but equally critical.

As it stated in a resolution:

*Persuadés de la nécessité de l'éducation chrétienne de la jeunesse, les catholiques lorrains déclarent s'en tenir fermement au maintien du caractère exceptionnel des écoles primaires et ne sauraient admettre aucun sabotage dans cet ordre d'idées.... Ils protestent contre la prorogation scolaire illégale et indésirable en Alsace-Lorraine.*⁶²⁵

The Catholic organisation became heavily involved in the anti-reform campaign and organised several meetings across the *département*. In Bouzonville, a large village situated in Schuman's constituency, Harter (deputy for Forbach) proclaimed the 10 October decree illegal. According to a prefectural report, *'[Harter] développa la même thèse que la majorité de ses collègues de la Moselle, protestant contre le décret du 10 Octobre qu'il qualifia d'illégal.'*⁶²⁶ The Forbach deputy went so far as to *'[conseiller] publiquement aux parents de ne pas se conformer aux nouvelles prescriptions et d'opposer une résistance passive aux menaces qui pourraient leur être adressées par l'Inspection académique.'*⁶²⁷

Following fruitless meetings between a delegation of Mosellan and Alsatian parliamentarians and the *sous-secrétaire d'état aux affaires d'Alsace-Lorraine*, Blum agreed to meet the delegation on 20 January 1937; Béron was the only Mosellan parliamentarian not to attend the meeting or participate in the anti-decree campaign. Afterwards, Blum issued a statement urging Alsatian and Mosellan senators and deputies to choose between two alternatives: A) maintain the current system (with bilingual and religious education) in place with the addition of one extra year for both sexes; B) conform to the system in place in the rest of the

⁶²⁴ AN, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 2 décembre 1936, F7/14614.

⁶²⁵ AN, 'Résolution de l'Action Catholique Lorraine du canton de Sarreguemines', novembre 1936, F7/14614.

⁶²⁶ AN, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 2 décembre 1936, F7/14614.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*

country, in other words maintain boys in school until the age of fourteen but adopt the national curriculum deprived of religious and bilingual education. Not surprisingly, Mosellan and Alsatian parliamentarians regarded this as a Hobson's choice and angrily promised free legal representation to any parents who chose to challenge the decree and face legal penalties.

Alongside the Action Catholique Lorraine, elected Mosellan officials organised a petition to maintain the current education system. With the help of the influential Ligue Féminine de l'Action Catholique Lorraine, headed by Madame Guy de Wendel, the petition succeeded in gathering over 126,000 signatures across the *département*.⁶²⁸ Aware of the rising tensions in the recovered provinces, Blum wrote to the bishop of Strasbourg, stating that he was not seeking a religious conflict and that his government would guarantee the rights of the local Catholic clergy.⁶²⁹ Following several other inconclusive meetings between the government and the Mosellan parliamentarians, numerous declarations of protest and repeated assurances from the government, tensions slowly decreased, ultimately ending when Blum resigned from his position as *président du Conseil* in June.

The crisis highlighted the strength of the *département's* conservative forces and their ability to mobilise large sections of the population. A rather telling example was the rise in membership of the Action Catholique Lorraine, which at the height of the crisis in February 1937 had shot up to 95,000 members,⁶³⁰ almost 30 percent of the adult population.⁶³¹ Additionally, Mosellan politicians could count on the support of conservatives from other regions of France. During a private meeting of the Action Catholique Lorraine in May, François Valentin, a Fédération

⁶²⁸ AN, Rapport du préfet au sous-secrétaire d'état à la présidence du Conseil, Metz, 18 mars 1937, F7/14614.

⁶²⁹ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire spécial adjoint détaché à Bitche au commissaire spécial, 15 février 1937, 98AL674-1. The direction des Cultes, which managed religious affairs for Alsace and the Moselle between 1919 and 1940, was located in Strasbourg. Consequently, the bishop of Strasbourg was the government's first point of contact for any affairs involving religious matters in the three recovered *départements*.

⁶³⁰ AN, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 11 février 1937, F7/14614.

⁶³¹ Statistique générale de la France, *Résultats statistiques de la population du recensement général effectué le 8 mars 1936*, Tome II, p.57.

Républicaine deputy from neighbouring Meurthe-et-Moselle, assured the 600-strong audience that the deputies of the Moselle and Alsace could rely on the support of the national parliamentary opposition who supported their campaign against the decree.⁶³² But in spite of the protests of the right and its determination to abrogate the decree, the decree was applied in Mosellan schools in October 1937. Interestingly enough, the police noted no resistance among parents or teachers.

One of the most likely explanations for the lack of reaction to the decree in October 1937 lay in the fact that by then Blum had ceased to be France's Premier and that Chautemps, his successor, took steps to reassure Catholics. In December 1937, the Conseil d'Etat cancelled the decree, claiming Blum's government had abused its legislative power. Another plausible explanation is that the people of the Moselle were simply uninterested in the issue. Despite the hundreds of thousands of signatures collected during the petition campaign, the movement against the decree was almost wholly the work of the Action Catholique Lorraine and the Union Républicaine Lorraine. This contrasted with the Mosellans' spontaneous reaction in 1924 to Herriot's announcement of plans to integrate the recovered provinces into the secular Republic. Then, the anti-Cartel movement was largely driven by popular support and new right-wing militant organisations such as the Fédération Nationale Catholique were created in response to this popular support. These contrasted reactions raise two questions: 1) had the Mosellans' attachment to their distinct school system diminished by 1937; and 2) was *la question scolaire* in 1937 merely an instrument used by parties in need of political legitimacy?

Whereas it is possible that affirmative answers to these two questions are both valid, the *préfet* interpreted the population's acceptance of the decree as follows: '*les populations lorraines ... ont conservé de la loi un sens trop aigu, fait de respect et de crainte, pour que puissent être commises ... des infractions*'.⁶³³ Whether or not the *préfet's* explanation was correct, the conflict between the

⁶³² AN, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 2 Juin 1937, F7/14614.

⁶³³ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 25 décembre 1937, 98AL634.

government and the protesters, which Julian Jackson calls a 'somewhat artificial controversy', succeeded in providing what he also describes as 'temporary ammunition for Catholic anti-Semites and other opponents of the Popular Front.'⁶³⁴ In the case of the Moselle, one should add that it provided ammunition chiefly to the Parti Social Français, which used it against both the Popular Front and its political rivals on the right.

Indeed, as the *préfet* wrote in a report,

*en ce qui concerne les rapports du Parti Social Français avec les autres formations politiques ... dont les doctrines sont susceptibles de s'apparenter aux siennes, il semble que la question de la scolarité ait contribué à aviver une certaine tension.*⁶³⁵

The row between the Parti Social Français and its rivals on the right seems to have started when the Parti Social Français launched its own anti-school reform campaign without consulting the Action Catholique Lorraine or the other *départemental* right-wing organisations. Indeed, on 8 February 1937, de la Rocque's party organised its own referendum urging the public to vote on two issues: 'A) *contre la prolongation de la scolarité et la suppression du bilinguisme*' ; 'B) *contre la suppression de l'école confessionnelle en Alsace et en Lorraine*'.⁶³⁶ Published in a one-page document in both French and German and carrying the emblem of the Parti Social Français, the referendum was carried out by keen party members and followers who visited thousands of households across the *département*.

At the party's monthly general assembly in Metz on 11 February 1937, which de la Rocque attended, Andres reported to the 3,000-strong audience that 25,000 signatures had been collected in only thirty-six hours.⁶³⁷ As for de la Rocque, he boldly claimed that since the opening of the party's general assembly one hour before, another 5,000 signatures had been collected; although the evidence for his assertion remains to be established. By May, the *préfet* estimated

⁶³⁴ Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, p.261.

⁶³⁵ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz 15 mai 1937, 98AL674-1.

⁶³⁶ Ascomemo, 'Référéndum organisé par le Parti Social Français, Referendum durch den Parti Social Français', nd, 26EDG.

⁶³⁷ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire spécial gare centrale Metz, 12 février 1937, 98AL674-1.

the number of signatures collected to be roughly 75,000 '*sans qu'il soit possible d'affirmer qu'elles ne figurent pas également sur les listes de l'Action Catholique.*'⁶³⁸ Because the Parti Social Français failed to consult any of the other right-wing organisations and organised its own referendum in parallel to that of the Action Catholique Lorraine, the Front Lorrain and the right-wing press retaliated by halting the publication of any articles reporting the party's activities in the *département*. De la Rocque's supporters in turn reacted swiftly by publicly criticising the Front Lorrain for accepting the support of Antoni and his Germanophile, autonomous Christlich-Soziale Partei.

Sensing that this conflict might be detrimental to the party's image, the central committee of the Parti Social Français highlighted the importance of a rapprochement with similar-minded organisations and urged the *départemental* section to come to an agreement with the Front Lorrain. When relations between the two organisations failed to improve, Jean Ybarnégaray, the leader of the Parti Social Français' group at the National Assembly, travelled to the Moselle to reconcile his party with the Front Lorrain. During a party meeting in Metz on 15 June, he declared: '*il ne faut pas croire que nous combattons des hommes comme ... l'abbé Ritz.... L'accord [avec le Front Lorrain] est amical. Bien qu'il y ait des hommes qui combattent le PSF, cela doit cesser à partir d'aujourd'hui même.*'⁶³⁹ Despite Ybarnégaray's best intentions, the quarrels continued. In July, the *préfet* reported that the Mosellan federation of the Parti Social Français published a communiqué denouncing the Front Lorrain's alleged formation of self-defence paramilitary units. Although de la Rocque's supporters knew that the Front Lorrain would never endorse the formation of such units, the *préfet* believed that the communiqué '*était indirectement dirigé contre le Front Lorrain, qui ... parait [au PSF] déployer des efforts préjudiciables à l'influence du Parti Social Français.*' As it became evident that the Parti Social Français' goal was political domination and electoral hegemony in the 1940 legislative elections, right-wing unity in the Moselle appeared unfeasible. Almost one year after the first Popular Front government

⁶³⁸ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 15 mai 1937, 98AL674-1.

⁶³⁹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 16 juin 1937, 98AL674-1.

took office, the right proved unable to recreate what the left had achieved a few years earlier. The failure of Doriot's attempt in May 1937 to unite the centre-right and the right in a broad coalition, known as Front de la Liberté, vividly illustrated the difficulty.

Before studying the Front de la Liberté in more detail, it is worth mentioning the violent riots which occurred in Clichy on 16 March 1937. These riots are of particular interest to this study as they revealed the rising tensions within the Popular Front and the growing desire of some right wingers to accelerate the fall of the left-wing coalition by uniting all anti-Communist parties in a broad coalition.

When the Parti Social Français announced it would hold a private meeting in Clichy on 16 March 1937, the local Popular Front committee and the town's Socialist mayor, Charles Auffray, claimed that since Clichy was a left-wing town located in the heart of the Paris 'red belt' the meeting ought to be banned by the government.⁶⁴⁰ Following the government's refusal to ban a meeting it considered lawful, local left wingers led by Auffray and the local Communist deputy Maurice Honel decided to hold a counter-demonstration on Clichy's place de la Mairie on the same day.⁶⁴¹ Seeking to avoid violent clashes erupting between the Parti Social Français supporters and the Popular Front counter-demonstrators, Marx Dormoy, the Socialist Minister of the Interior, sent a large force of police to Clichy. Nonetheless a street battle took place between police forces and Popular Front supporters after left-wing demonstrators tried to force their way into the Olympia cinema, where the Parti Social Français were meeting. Despite Honel and Auffray's repeated calls for calm, the violence escalated and by 10 o'clock Clichy became a battlefield. Stones and glass bottles were thrown at police forces, who retaliated by firing shots into the crowd. Later police reports claimed six dead (five Communists and one Socialist who died from her injuries two weeks later) and at least two hundred wounded on both sides including Mayor Auffray and André Blumel, Blum's *directeur de cabinet*.

⁶⁴⁰ The meeting was a private showing of a screen adaptation of *La Bataille*, a novel written by the French Academician and de la Rocque's supporter Claude Farrère.

⁶⁴¹ 'Ce soir, à Clichy rassemblement antifasciste !', *Le Populaire*, 16 mars 1937; in APPP, BA1865.

The Clichy riots had a significant effect upon the Popular Front coalition. As Kedward writes, 'The Popular Front was never the same after Clichy'.⁶⁴² Before the judicial enquiry ordered by the government was even launched, the PCF severely criticised Dormoy for having failed to ban the Parti Social Français meeting in Clichy. During a Communist meeting at the Vélodrome d'Hiver on 18 March, a Communist leader declared,

*Nous avons effectué plusieurs démarches auprès du Ministre de l'Intérieur pour lui demander d'interdire la provocation fasciste. Cette interdiction n'est pas venue. Nous avons fait notre devoir, les sphères dirigeantes n'ont pas cru devoir accomplir le leur.*⁶⁴³

The PCF demanded the immediate arrest of de la Rocque and Doriot, '*le maire hitlérien de Saint-Denis qui a partie liée avec de la Rocque*', as Duclos put it.⁶⁴⁴ It also blamed the police forces, which, it believed, harboured Parti Social Français' supporters and Chiappistes.⁶⁴⁵ Alongside the CGT, the Communists called for a half-day strike of mourning and solidarity with the victims of Clichy. A few days later, around 250,000 mourners gathered in Paris to commemorate the funerals of those who died during the riots.⁶⁴⁶

Despite the PCF's evident irritation towards Dormoy, Thorez's party reiterated its full support to the Popular Front government, albeit on a much more conditional basis. At the Vélodrome d'Hiver meeting on 18 March, Duclos declared, '*Nous resterons autour du gouvernement à direction socialiste dans la mesure où il dirigera ses coups contre les ennemis du régime et non contre la classe ouvrière.*'⁶⁴⁷ According to the police, Duclos' words were received favourably by the Communist audience, who cheered and applauded their leader. But despite Duclos' declaration, the collaboration between Communists and

⁶⁴² Kedward, *op.cit.*, p.212.

⁶⁴³ APPP, 'Meeting organisé par le Parti Communiste, au Vélodrome d'Hiver, rue Nélaton, le 18 mars', BA1865.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁵ The term refers to supporters of Jean Chiappe, the *préfet* de police de la Seine, dismissed by Daladier on 3 February 1934.

⁶⁴⁶ 'Victims of the Paris Riots', *The Times*, 22 March 1937, p.12.

⁶⁴⁷ APPP, 'Meeting organisé par le Parti Communiste, au Vélodrome d'Hiver, rue Nélaton, le 18 mars', BA1865.

Socialists within the context of a Popular Front was clearly strained. Following the crisis of the Spanish War and the PCF's refusal to endorse the government's foreign policy in parliament in December 1936, the Clichy events revealed the growing tensions within the coalition. The fragility of the Popular Front did not go unnoticed on the right.

On the right, politicians reacted swiftly and violently to the Clichy riots. Confronted by the left's accusations of maintaining the philosophy and violent methods of the banned Croix de Feu, Ybarnégaray, for the Parti Social Français, insisted the party had nothing in common with the proscribed *ligue*. And in response to the Communists' attacks on his leader, he declared, '*l'émeute de Clichy ... a été montée contre le néo-poincarisme du ministère Blum. Il annonçait au ciel de France une période de paix, de tranquillité. Cela a paru intolérable aux communistes.*'⁶⁴⁸

The term *néo-poincarisme* referred to Blum's recent call for a pause in political reforms. The main cause for Blum's decision to call for a pause was the state's dire financial situation. Despite the devaluation of the franc in September 1936, Blum was unable to avoid a further unsettling decline of the franc: hence his decision to initiate a pause in order to restore confidence in the financial markets. During the pause, the government sharply reduced public spending on *grands travaux* and other items, and appointed three experts to assist the Governor of the Banque de France, Emile Labeyrie, in the management of the *fonds d'égalisation des changes*. At the eve of the Clichy riots, Blum had also secured a special loan for national defence, which, he believed, would benefit the monetary and financial stability of the country and consequently '*consolider et accélérer la reprise économique.*'⁶⁴⁹

The right largely mocked his financial policy, with one of *Le Temps*'s columns reading '*Ce n'est pas une pause, c'est une conversion*' and Paul Reynaud, deputy for Paris, claiming, '*On adore maintenant ce qu'on a brûlé: la*

⁶⁴⁸ Grandmougin, *op.cit.*, p.315.

⁶⁴⁹ Blum, *L'Œuvre 1934-1937*, p.487.

liberté de l'or et l'équilibre budgétaire'.⁶⁵⁰ Significantly, however, some on the far left were equally severe. A headline in the Trotskyite *Jeunesses Socialistes* newspaper read, '*8 milliards pour l'emprunt, 5 morts à Clichy: l'argent de la bourgeoisie se paie avec le sang des ouvriers*'.⁶⁵¹ And in a tract published by the revolutionary left, Pivert asked, '*Les forces de police tirant sur les ouvriers antifascistes, sous un gouvernement de Front Populaire à direction socialiste, est-ce la rançon de la politique de confiance exigée par les banques?*'⁶⁵² Blum defended the pause and financial reforms by retorting to his numerous critics: '*ce n'est ni un renoncement, ni un reniement, ni une abjuration, mais la nécessité de souffler, d'arrêter la course entre les prix et les salaires, d'agir contre les prix excessifs avec des armes répressives*'.⁶⁵³ Attacked from the left and the right, the government appeared weakened: the Clichy crisis could not have come at a worse time for the government.

Sensing a major ideological shift on the part of the government and a weakening of the relations between the constituent parties of the Popular Front, the right intensified its attacks. Passmore suggests that the Parti Social Français' anti-Communism reached its peak after the Clichy riots in March when, as he writes, 'the PSF campaigned noisily for [the PCF's] dissolution.'⁶⁵⁴ But even more critical of the Communist party was Doriot, the founder and leader of the Parti Populaire Français, who launched the idea of a Front de la Liberté in March 1937.

The Front de la Liberté and the Mosellan anti-Marxist front

By creating the Front de la Liberté, Doriot sought to gather all right wingers into a *rassemblement* that aimed to, in his own's words, '*[e]nraye la bolchévisation*

⁶⁵⁰ Grandmougin, *op.cit.*, p.312.

⁶⁵¹ Kergoat, *op.cit.*, p.218.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.* Following the publication of the article, the *Jeunesses Socialistes*, which the Trotskyite left controlled, dismissed twenty-two of its leading members in the Seine *département*. Similarly, before the SFIO's insistence, Marceau Pivert was persuaded to dissolve the revolutionary left.

⁶⁵³ AN, Blum papers, note manuscrite, nd, 570AP13.

⁶⁵⁴ Passmore, *From liberalism to fascism*, p.261.

intérieure de la France,⁶⁵⁵ and to *lutter contre le communisme qui, actuellement, impose ses volontés au gouvernement socialiste*.⁶⁵⁶ Doriot had first talked publicly of a Front de la Liberté in the Parti Populaire Français' newspaper, *L'Emancipation nationale*, in March, but revived the idea at a party meeting on 7 May. The movement's programme focused on two main principles: 1) restore the various freedoms the Communists had allegedly destroyed such as *'la liberté de travail ... la liberté de penser...la liberté de la presse'*,⁶⁵⁷ 2) form a new government based upon - and Doriot insisted on this - *'les règles constitutionnelles de la troisième République'*.⁶⁵⁸ When Doriot created the Front de la Liberté, what he really had in mind was to offer a right-wing alternative to the Popular Front in time for the October 1937 local elections. The parties it called upon to join the Front included the Fédération Républicaine, the Parti Républicain National et Social, the Parti Social Français, the Alliance Démocratique and the Parti Démocrate Populaire.⁶⁵⁹ Although the Fédération Républicaine and the Parti Républicain National et Social immediately accepted the invitation, the Parti Social Français, the Alliance Démocratique and the Parti Démocrate Populaire rejected it.

According to Irvine, 'neither the Alliance Démocratique nor the Parti Démocrate Populaire seriously contemplated joining the Front de la Liberté ... [n]ot only because it involved "the politics of the two blocs", which they were determined to avoid, but it also represented a highly unsavoury union' with what they considered 'the representatives of "a reactionary conservatism."'”⁶⁶⁰ To those who criticised the Fédération Républicaine for joining a movement created by a former Communist, Xavier Vallat, deputy for the Ardèche, declared, *'On a pu s'étonner que nous ayons adhéré au « Front de la Liberté », dont le chef, Jacques Doriot, est un ancien communiste; or, nous ne sommes pas rangés derrière Doriot, mais*

⁶⁵⁵ Parti Populaire Français, *Comment les Communistes nous trompent*, Saint-Denis: Parti Populaire Français, février 1937, p.19.

⁶⁵⁶ APPF, 'Rapport sur le meeting organisé par le Parti Populaire Français au Vélodrome d'Hiver le 7 mai', 8 mai 1937, BA2002.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁹ CHSPo, de la Rocque papers, 'Déclaration de Jacques Doriot', 8 mai 1937, LR19.

⁶⁶⁰ Irvine, *op.cit.*, pp.146-147.

à côté de lui.⁶⁶¹ He then added, 'Ce n'est pas parce que la Fédération Républicaine adhère au Front de la Liberté qu'elle abandonne le programme qui lui est propre, d'ailleurs, on ne le lui a pas demandé.'⁶⁶² Irvine states that the Fédération Républicaine's eagerness to ally with what he called 'the most sordid elements of the extreme, antirepublican Right was indicative of the anxiety of some conservatives during the years of the Popular Front.'⁶⁶³ What is more, as Irvine affirms, it also presented the Fédération Républicaine 'with an opportunity to defend itself against the attacks of its too ambitious rival, the Parti Social Français.'⁶⁶⁴

Doriot repeatedly invited the Parti Social Français to join the Front de la Liberté, but each time de la Rocque insisted on new conditions only to reject them thereafter. On 9 June, the Parti Social Français' national committee publicly rejected Doriot's invitation. One reason it gave was fear of provoking civil conflict:

*Considérant que [l]'adhésion des deux millions de membres du PSF à un « Front » risquerait d'enlever à la masse du parti son caractère de réconciliation française et de la faire apparaître, malgré lui, comme un appareil de lutte civique ... [le Parti Social Français] [d]écide ne pas adhérer au Front de la Liberté...*⁶⁶⁵

The party also sent a communiqué to all its cadres in which it condemned the formation of a right-wing bloc, which it believed, could only favour the Popular Front. Convinced that, as the communiqué put it, '*certaines de ces électeurs n'accepteront jamais de donner leur confiance à un bloc de droite*', the national committee believed it was in the party's interest to remain outside such a group.⁶⁶⁶ Although he did not admit it publicly, de la Rocque also believed that by keeping out of the right-wing alliance his party would benefit from the disillusioned middle-

⁶⁶¹ APPP, 'Rapport sur la réunion organisée par le Front de la Liberté au Vélodrome d'Hiver le 22 juin', 23 juin 1937, BA2002.

⁶⁶² CHSPo, de la Rocque papers, 'Compte-rendu sur la réunion du Front de la Liberté au Vélodrome d'Hiver le 22 juin 1937', nd, LR19.

⁶⁶³ Irvine, *op. cit.*, p.147.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁵ CHSPo, de la Rocque papers, 'Ordre du jour voté par le conseil national extraordinaire du PSF réuni à Paris le 9 juin 1937', LR19.

⁶⁶⁶ CHSPo, de la Rocque papers, 'La non-adhésion du PSF au Front de la Liberté', nd, LR19.

classes' change of allegiance in the wake of the Popular Front's inability to solve the economic crisis.

While this was almost certainly true, historians agree that de la Rocque's main reason for refusing to join the Front de la Liberté was to maintain his party's independence. According to Irvine, de la Rocque feared Doriot's ambitions. As he writes, 'De la Rocque distrusted Doriot, whom he correctly suspected of designs on the Parti Social Français.'⁶⁶⁷ Passmore shares Irvine's view, as he states, 'The [Parti Social Français] rejected an initiative that it rightly saw as an attempt to neutralise it.'⁶⁶⁸ Regarding the Parti Social Français, Irvine writes that de la Rocque did not wish his party 'to be reduced to the role of a 'league' at the disposal of the conservatives and *modérés*.'⁶⁶⁹ Similarly, he wanted to portray his party as legalist and Republican rather than subversive and Fascist; something the Parti Populaire Français was often accused of by its detractors. Indeed, despite Doriot's left-wing political background and his best efforts to present the Parti Populaire Français as legalist and Republican, many contemporaries regarded him as, what Soucy calls, 'a proponent of the very fascism that he had previously denounced.'⁶⁷⁰

Doriot's reaction to the Parti Social Français' refusal was swift. On 10 June, he declared to some of his associates,

*Je pourrais désormais écraser [de la Rocque], mais je veux le laisser s'enfermer lui-même.... Je ne veux ... rien faire pour l'instant car il faut laisser venir à nous ceux qui, en grand nombre, vont abandonner Casimir [de la Rocque].*⁶⁷¹

He later condemned the Parti Social Français as '*torpilleurs de l'union nationale*'.⁶⁷² The Fédération Républicaine contrasted de la Rocque's 'arrogance' with the humility he had displayed when he formed his own political group at the

⁶⁶⁷ Irvine, *op.cit.*, p.148.

⁶⁶⁸ Passmore, *op.cit.*, p.291.

⁶⁶⁹ Irvine, *op.cit.*, p.148.

⁶⁷⁰ Soucy, *French Fascism: the Second Wave*, p.205.

⁶⁷¹ APPP, Rapport sur le parti populaire français, 10 juin 1937, BA2002.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*

National Assembly and solicited the Fédération deputies' support in 1936.⁶⁷³ Within de la Rocque's own party, many were confused and disappointed by their leader's decision and, according to the police, approximately 5,000 Parisian party members subsequently left to join the Parti Populaire Français.⁶⁷⁴ Pozzo di Borgo, one of the founding members of the Croix de Feu and once a close associate of de la Rocque, was highly critical of the Parti Social Français' leader. According to a police informer, he predicted, '*des démissions nombreuses ... au profit du Parti Populaire Français*' particularly '*dans certaines régions acquises au Parti Social Français ... [telles que] Metz*'.⁶⁷⁵

In Metz, following a Parti Populaire Français party meeting on 28 June, Doriot's supporters distributed hundreds of leaflets to the people who came to hear Gilbert Bayer, a leader of the Mosellan party federation. The leaflet read : '*Front de la Liberté! Le Français a le droit de s'exprimer librement même s'il n'a pas le catéchisme stalinien dans sa poche!*'⁶⁷⁶ Despite the Front de la Liberté's attempt to establish itself in the Moselle, it suffered the same fate as its parent party, the Parti Populaire Français. Because the latter was rather weak in terms of sections and supporters, it was unable to push the Front de la Liberté forward. Consequently, the latter failed to establish itself as a political organisation. As the Parti Populaire Français, it counted only three sections in the Moselle at the time of the creation of the Front de la Liberté: 200 members in Metz, 200 in Thionville and 200 in Basse-Yutz.⁶⁷⁷ Despite a programme that had the potential to attract many Mosellans, with its call for '*la division du pays en régions autonomes avec des chambres régionales qui enverront à Paris des délégués pour construire une chambre*

⁶⁷³ APPP, Rapport sur le Parti Social Français, nd, BA2002.

⁶⁷⁴ APPP, Rapport de police, 15 juin 1937, BA2002.

⁶⁷⁵ APPP, Rapport de police, 18 juin 1937, BA2002.

⁶⁷⁶ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 28 juin 1937, 98AL674-1.

⁶⁷⁷ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 25 avril 1937, 98AL634. The Parti Populaire Français' newspaper, *L'Emancipation Nationale*, estimated the party membership at 100,000 for the whole of France in November 1936; in Philippe Machefer, 'L'Union des Droites, le P.S.F. et le Front de la Liberté, 1936-1937', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 17, 1, 1970, p.117.

unifiée', the party failed to gain the support of the local population.⁶⁷⁸ Even Doriot's much-publicised visit in Metz on 22 May 1937 – his first to the Mosellan capital – which, judging by the large crowd waiting for him may have heralded a success, did not lead to a rise in party membership. According to the police, the audience was far more curious to see the party leader than to listen to his speech or join his party.⁶⁷⁹

According to the *préfet's* records, the Mosellan federation was headed mainly by ex-Communists such as Eugène Mathis, who once worked as a journalist at *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine*, and *ex-ligueurs* from the dissolved Jeunesses Patriotes and Solidarité Française.⁶⁸⁰ It had a small office in the centre of Metz and tried to hold, albeit unsuccessfully, monthly meetings. But despite an active propaganda campaign, the Parti Populaire Français failed to attract the support of the Mosellan masses. According to a prefectural report, '*il semble se confirmer ... que les doctrines de ce parti n'ont pas pénétré dans la masse de la population et qu'elles restent l'apanage d'un groupe restreint d'anciens militants de ligues dissoutes.*'⁶⁸¹ Unlike in some parts of Paris, the Parti Populaire Français did not seem to benefit from any defections from members of the Parti Social Français. In fact, the latter's decision to discard the Front de la Liberté appeared inconsequential judging by its continuous growth in the Moselle. Indeed, the Parti Social Français counted over 20,000 members by May 1937, almost 3,000 more than in January.⁶⁸² What is more, the regional offices of *la Région de l'Est du PSF* had recently been moved from Nancy to Metz, thus highlighting the strength and leading role of the Mosellan section over neighbouring sections.⁶⁸³

Why did the Front de la Liberté fail in the Moselle? Firstly, it is likely that the Parti Social Français' popularity and aggressive propaganda eclipsed it. According

⁶⁷⁸ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire divisionnaire de Strasbourg au préfet du Bas-Rhin, 21 mai 1938, 98AL673-2.

⁶⁷⁹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 24 mai 1937, 98AL634

⁶⁸⁰ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 2 avril 1937, 98AL673-2.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸² ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 15 mai 1937, 98AL674-1.

⁶⁸³ The *Région de l'Est du PSF* included the Moselle, the Meurthe-et-Moselle, the Vosges and the Meuse.

to the *préfet*, the Mosellan leaders of the Parti Social Français feared and resented the creation of a rival movement and were rather bitter at Doriot's relative success during his visit to Metz on 22 May. As he wrote in a report, '*les éléments dirigeants du "Parti Social Français" auraient conçu quelque rancœur d'un résultat aussi soudain, dont ils croyaient avoir, jusqu'ici, l'apanage exclusif.*'⁶⁸⁴ Secondly, Mosellans already had their own *rassemblement de nationaux* in the Front Lorrain, which, incidentally, the Parti Populaire Français joined. As a result, the local population, faced with yet another *rassemblement*, chose to ignore a movement that also happened to come from what Irvine describes as 'a former Communist *enragé*' *de l'Intérieur*.⁶⁸⁵

Thirdly, as shall be seen later in this chapter, the Mosellan right created its own electoral bloc for the October elections under the leadership of the Front Lorrain. Consistent with its refusal to co-operate with non-Mosellan organisations, such as the Meurthe-et-Mosellan Rassemblement National Lorrain, the Front Lorrain did not accept to be chaperoned by a movement *de l'Intérieur*. Could the Union Républicaine Lorraine have helped the Front de la Liberté? Unfortunately, too little is known of the relations between the Mosellan Catholic party and the Front de la Liberté as sources are scarce. Nonetheless, given what this study has revealed of the Union Républicaine Lorraine and its refusal to associate with any organisation beyond Mosellan borders, it is safe to argue that it would probably have rejected Doriot's calls. Be that as it may, it is not even clear whether the Parti Populaire Français called on the Union Républicaine Lorraine's support. One thing, however, remains certain: the Front de la Liberté's failure to ally French and Mosellan right-wing forces in an anti-Communist bloc demonstrated, once more, the right's inability to overcome its divisions. It also illustrated a certain lack of political judgement on the part of some right wingers, who instead of capitalising on the evident breakdown of the Popular Front by presenting a united front to the electorate, preferred to wait to see the left-wing coalition fail.

⁶⁸⁴ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 24 mai 1937, 98AL634.

⁶⁸⁵ Irvine, *op.cit.*, p.146.

Following the terrorist attacks carried out by the secret extreme right-wing Comité Secret d'Action Révolutionnaire (CSAR) in Paris on 11 September and fearing an eruption of violence on the streets of his *département*, the *préfet* of the Moselle published an arrêt which proscribed all public gatherings and demonstrations until the end of the elections.⁶⁸⁶ The CSAR, also known as the Cagoule, reflected a virulent right-wing reaction to Communism and marked the extreme radicalisation of a fraction of conservative society. It was a secret organisation founded by dissident members of the royalist Action Française shortly after the electoral victory of the Popular Front in May 1936. Convinced that the Action Française was no match to the imminent Communist revolution that was to take place in France, the Cagoule leaders believed the situation required what Warner Geoffrey calls, 'a more efficient and ruthless organization'.⁶⁸⁷

The Cagoule's attacks in Paris, which targeted the offices of two employers' unions, the Confédération Générale du Patronat Français and the Union des Industries Métallurgiques, made instant headlines in the press. While the right-wing press attributed the explosions to foreign Communists and Anarchists, *L'Humanité* blamed foreign fascists. As an article in the right-wing *Le Jour* claimed, '*C'est dans les milieux anarchistes, et plus spécialement parmi les terroristes qui ont fait leur apprentissage en Espagne rouge, qu'il faut chercher les coupables.*'⁶⁸⁸ For Pierre-Laurent Darnar from *L'Humanité*, '*Le fascisme hitlérien et mussolinien, lui qui ne cesse de menacer en paroles et en actes la France, voilà le coupable.*'⁶⁸⁹ Although the terrorist organisation appeared to have had no supporters in the Moselle, the explosions, the ensuing police investigation and the arrests in December had a certain effect in the *département*.

⁶⁸⁶ ADBR, 'Arrêté', 15 septembre 1937, signé: Marc Chevalier, préfet de la Moselle, Metz, 98AL1069-1.

⁶⁸⁷ Geoffrey Warner, 'The Cagoulard Conspiracy', *History Today*, 10, 7, July 1960, p.444.

⁶⁸⁸ 'On recherche les criminels parmi les anarchistes venus d'Espagne', *Le Jour*, 15 septembre 1937, p.1.

⁶⁸⁹ Pierre-Laurent Darnar, 'Bombes étrangères disposées par des agents de l'étranger', *L'Humanité*, 13 septembre 1937, p.2.

As the *préfet* noted in a report, Mosellans '*ont suivi le développement de cette affaire [de la Cagoule] avec un intérêt des plus vifs*'.⁶⁹⁰ Even though he claimed that overall the population remained relatively calm during the police investigation, an article published in *L'Echo de Metz*, the Francophone bi-monthly publication of the Communist section of Metz, suggested otherwise. According to the newspaper, local Communists protested against the meeting planned by the Comité de Défense des Patriotes on 14 January 1938. The committee was an association of right wingers opposed to Communism which included General Henri Giraud, the military commander of Metz. Protesting against the public gathering of men who defended, as *L'Echo de Metz* put it, the '*Cagouleurs complotant avec l'aide de Hitler, Mussolini et Franco, attentats terroristes [et] assassinats*', the Communists asked the *Préfecture* to ban the meeting.⁶⁹¹ As the Parti Social Français did not appear on the list of the meeting, the *préfet* rejected the Communist request arguing that there was no risk of violence. In the words of *L'Echo de Metz*, '*Coup de téléphone à la Préfecture. On répond: "Ce n'est pas grave, puisque le Parti Social Français ne participe pas."*'⁶⁹² However, when the left planned a counter-demonstration in Metz on the 13th, which could have led to a confrontation between Communists and supporters of the right, the *préfet* cancelled the gathering of the Comité de Défense des Patriotes. Although *L'Echo de Metz* published many articles on this particular event, there is no trace of it in any of the police reports consulted.

What the *préfet* did report, however, was the spread of a general atmosphere of suspicion and denunciations emanating directly from the Cagoule affair. Authors sent letters of denunciation to the police, accusing some of concealing arms and ammunitions or pointing the police towards secret caches. As the police found no arms and made no arrests, the authorities concluded that the denunciations, anonymous for the most part, were the fabrication of individuals eager to settle old personal feuds.

⁶⁹⁰ ADBR, Rapport mensuel, Metz, 25 décembre 1937, 98AL634.

⁶⁹¹ 'Le 14 Janvier Metz a vomit le fascisme assassin, *L'Echo de Metz*, 20 janvier 1938, p.1.

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*

During the police investigation of the Cagoule, the Mosellan right-wing press, in particular *Le Messin*, published a series of alarming headlines against the Communist party and the Popular Front candidates at the local elections. On 4 October, *Le Messin* reported the story of 300 Communists who allegedly attacked supporters of the local Parti Social Français candidate, Jean Philippe Grange, during one of his electoral meetings in Hayange.⁶⁹³ Described as foreigners carrying razors and knives, the attackers wounded several people leaving two in a critical state. Grange's version of events, as reported by *Le Messin*, described the attack as '*cette sauvage agression*' organised by '*des gens qui n'ont pas quitté le conseiller sortant [Béron] depuis le début de la campagne*'.⁶⁹⁴ The latter statement, which sought to discredit Béron, was categorically refuted by the police. In a report, the *préfet* noted that '*l'incident [de Hayange] a été grossi et déformé, dans une partie de la presse*' and that '*les déclarations de M. Grange se révèlent manifestement exagérées*'.⁶⁹⁵ He concluded, '*les partisans de Béron y sont absolument étrangers, contrairement aux assertions de M. Grange.*'

As for *Le Lorrain*, its interpretation of the events in the mining town of Stiring-Wendel, where supporters of the Parti Social Français clashed with the Popular Front's, led the *préfet* to order the Mosellan press to print a formal démenti. In reaction to the Parti Social Français' announcement of a meeting in Stiring-Wendel on 29 August, the local Popular Front committee decided to hold a counter-reunion in a nearby hall. As the first members of the Parti Social Français arrived, the Popular Front supporters made abusive comments and shouted insults. Determined to avoid an escalation of violence, the *sous-préfet* urged the left-wing supporters to leave for their hall, which they did. According to the *préfet*, the police arrested two men, who, upon verification of their identification papers, were released within the hour.⁶⁹⁶ In comparison, *Le Lorrain's* report presented a radically different and much more dramatic interpretation of events. It claimed among other things that the Popular Front demonstrators were led by '*des*

⁶⁹³ 'A Hayange-Cité', *Le Messin*, 4 octobre 1937, p.2.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁵ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 6 octobre 1937, 98AL1069-1

⁶⁹⁶ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 31 août 1937, 98AL674-1.

semeurs de haine étrangers... Italiens, Polonais, Tchèques etc' and how '*la bande communiste ... littéralement déchainée ... bris[a] les vitres des autos [des membres du Parti Social Français] à coups de cailloux ... et les maltraitèrent sauvagement.*'⁶⁹⁷ Whereas the *préfet* reported two arrests, *Le Lorrain* told of eight arrests among the Popular Front protesters and one wounded police officer; the latter '*fut arraché des son cheval, jeté par terre et sauvagement piétiné.*' To be sure, the right-wing dailies of Metz did not wait for the Cagoule affair to publish scaremongering stories about the Communists, but with the approaching local elections, they seized the opportunity to remind the population of the violence and disregard for legality of the Popular Front and the Communists.

It was within this context that the local elections of 10 and 17 October 1937 took place. As *The Times* correspondent in Paris noted on the eve of the first round of the election, 'An unusual degree of political interest attaches to the Cantonal Elections' as '[t]his time the conflict is on a frankly partisan basis, and both Government and Opposition have marshalled their forces on an imposing scale.'⁶⁹⁸

At the national level, the Fédération Républicaine, the Parti Populaire Français and the Parti Républicain National et Social agreed to present a single candidate in each *canton* and *arrondissement* under the banner of the Front de la Liberté. But despite the determined efforts of party leaders to create a united front, divisions and personal ambitions prevailed, resulting in a large number of dissident candidates who refused the patronage of the Front de la Liberté at the first round. In the end, the Front de la Liberté had to settle for an alliance similar to that of the Popular Front whereby each candidate would enter the first round separately, while agreeing not to stand against a fellow right winger in a second round if he were the stronger candidate. On the left, the three main parties agreed to adhere to the Popular Front, although as in 1936 some Radical-Socialist candidates refused.

⁶⁹⁷ 'A Stiring-Wendel, les hordes moscoutaires provoquent de violentes bagarres', *Le Lorrain*, 31 août 1937, p.2

⁶⁹⁸ 'Party Test in France, Local Elections To-Morrow', *The Times*, 9 October 1937, p.11.

In the Moselle, even though the *préfet* took pride in claiming that the elections in his *département* did not take the form of a plebiscite on the Popular Front, the divide between right and left was clear. On the right, local right-wing parties and organisations did not unite in the Front de la Liberté. Instead, they agreed to present one single candidate whenever possible by creating their own local anti-Communist bloc under the auspices of the Front Lorrain. The parties which joined the bloc included the Parti Social Français, the Parti Populaire Français, the Christian-Social party and the Francistes.⁶⁹⁹ Although most candidates agreed to stand down in favour of fellow right wingers, others flatly refused to do so.

In many cantons such as Metz 3, Pange and Verny, right wingers competed against one another. In Cattenom, the three right-wing candidates, two Union Républicaine Démocratique and one Républicain de Gauche, rejected the principle of a single candidacy and, despite the Front Lorrain's intervention, competed against one another at the first round.⁷⁰⁰ Determined not to let the left benefit from the right's divisions, the Front Lorrain intervened and persuaded Schuman, whom the local population knew as their deputy, to run as the official candidate of the anti-Communist coalition at the second round. On the left, the parties agreed to follow the line of the Popular Front and present their own candidates at the first round. While the PCF succeeded in presenting candidates in every canton, the SFIO only managed to present candidates in the *canton* of industrial Moyeuvre, near west Thionville, and in Cattenom, Schuman's fiefdom.

With a turnout of roughly 70 percent of the electorate, Mosellans voted for the right-wing bloc en masse.⁷⁰¹ Unlike the national results, which gave the Popular Front a clear majority, the Mosellan elections confirmed the conservatives'

⁶⁹⁹ The other co-signatories, gathered in the Rassemblement National et Social, were the Parti Républicain National et Social, the Parti Chrétien National, the Front National du Travail (Volksständischen Arbeiterfront), the Parti Agraire, the Union Anti-maçonnique de France and the Royalist Alliance Fabert. ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 10 septembre 1937, 98AL1069-1.

⁷⁰⁰ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 19 octobre 1937, 98AL-1069-1.

⁷⁰¹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 11 octobre 1937, 98AL1069-1.

supremacy in the *Conseil Général*.⁷⁰² In terms of votes, the right won 65 percent and the left 35 percent.⁷⁰³ In terms of seats, the right's domination was even greater: thirty-two cantons compared to only four won by the left. All four of the left's seats were located in industrial areas.⁷⁰⁴ Both Hoffman (SFIO in Forbach) and Béron (Independent Socialist in Hayange) were re-elected. The two newcomers on the left were Communists Muller and Anstett, who respectively won cantons in Saint-Avold and in Metz. In the mining canton of Saint-Avold, Muller, who could barely speak French and communicated mainly in German, benefited from the support of the miners as well as the right's disunity. As the Front Lorrain had tried to impose its own candidate, Neu, a leading member of the Bauernbund, Alex Wiltzer, the local URD deputy, also ran for election. Wiltzer disagreed with the Front Lorrain, insisting that the anti-Popular Front camp should not be led by an extremist renowned for his autonomous and fascist views as well as his leading position within the Bauernbund.

The Bauernbund, known in French as Union Paysanne, was a union of farmers who sought initially, as Goodfellow writes, 'to protect and defend peasant interests at a time when economic development was undermining traditional life.'⁷⁰⁵ Founded around milk cooperatives in the Haut-Rhin in early 1924, the Bauernbund gradually engaged in political action under the leadership of Joseph Bilger who succeeded the movement's founder, André Gestermann, in 1928. Clearly affiliated with the autonomous and clerical Germanophile camp, the organisation condemned Communism, big business and liberal capitalism. In 1935, the Bauernbund became radicalised. It published its own newspaper, *Die Volk* and employed a motto reminiscent of the Christlich-Soziale Partei and the Parti Social Français', *Familie – Arbeit – Heimat – Christentum*. Bilger integrated the Bauernbund into his new Volksständischen Arbeiterfront (Front National du

⁷⁰² According to Kergoat, the Popular Front won roughly 4.5 million votes and the right just over 3 million; in Kergoat, *op.cit.*, p.225.

⁷⁰³ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 11 octobre 1937, 98AL1069-1.

⁷⁰⁴ ADBR, 'Situation politique du Conseil Général avant et après le renouvellement d'octobre 1937', Cabinet du préfet, Metz, 19 octobre 1937, 98AL1069-1.

⁷⁰⁵ Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine*, p.89.

Travail) alongside two new groups: the Werkbund, a collective union of blue- and white-collar workers, and the Kampforganisationen, shock troops comprising young activists from the Jung-Front who wore distinctive green shirts.⁷⁰⁶ Robert Paxton notes that Henri Dorgères' Front Paysan - a particularly militant right-wing movement most popular in western France during the 1930s – also known as the Chemises Vertes, adopted the green shirt uniforms for its own youth organisation (Jeunesses Paysannes or Chemises Vertes) after meeting Bilger in 1935. As he writes, 'The Greenshirt idea seems to have crystallized on 10 June 1935, when Dorgères made his one visit to Alsace to speak at a meeting organized [in the Haut-Rhin] ... by Joseph Bilger's Bauernbund.'⁷⁰⁷

Following the Popular Front electoral victory in June 1936, the Mosellan Bauernbund became heavily involved in local anti-Communist activities and quickly joined the Front Lorrain under the auspices of its parent organisation, the Front National du Travail. The latter, which by including blue- and white-collar workers, sought to create a socially varied political organisation, remained largely a peasant movement popular among small landowners. Geographically speaking, it was rather limited and was successful in mobilising rural discontent mostly in the Haut-Rhin, where it had originated. As Goodfellow writes, 'Well over half of the Bauernbund's membership came from the Haut-Rhin; the rest were thinly spread out over Bas-Rhin and Lorraine.'⁷⁰⁸

In the Moselle, where a local section, the Lothringer Bauernbund (Union Paysanne Lorraine), was created in 1932, the organisation had relatively few members, drawing most of them from the German- and dialect-speaking rural cantons around Sarrebourg and Saint-Avold: precisely where the Autonomist movement had emerged in the 1920s. Despite their attempt to associate blue- and white-collar workers with the peasant world by creating the Werkbund, the Bauernbund and the Front National du Travail focused largely on serving the interests of a small minority made up of German and dialect-speaking small

⁷⁰⁶ Colas, *op.cit.*, p.111.

⁷⁰⁷ Robert O. Paxton, *French Peasant Fascism: Henry Dorgère's Greenshirts and the Crises of French Agriculture*, New-York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.64.

⁷⁰⁸ Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine*, p.95.

landowners. Thus, by excluding a large section of Mosellan society such as the Francophone elites as well as the urban and industrial masses, the Bauernbund failed to develop a popular base in the Moselle.

A second factor that could have contributed to the Bauernbund lack of growth was the Moselle's resistance to autonomist movements. As demonstrated in chapter One, the Moselle, though particularist and eager to maintain its special laws and customs, did not share Alsace's inclination for separatist movements. But the re-integration of the Moselle into French sovereignty was now nearly eighteen years old, during which a new generation had come of age under the French state, and the *département's* particularism, which once defined its political character and preferences, was now less prominent. Indeed, while language and culture and the defence of the region's particular laws had largely shaped Mosellan society and politics up to 1936, new divisions along political, and to some extent socio-economic, lines emerged in the wake of the Popular Front victory in 1936. While the strike movement of 1936 and the collective contracts provided Mosellan workers with a hitherto unknown political and social identity and sense of unity, so the question of regional identity and particularism moved from centre stage among workers. Consequently, the latter began to look beyond the boundaries of their cultural and linguistic heritage and identify themselves within the wider national political context. Though it is certain that other factors such as the economic crisis and the rise of Nazi Germany contributed to alter Mosellan politics, for the first time since the return of the province to French sovereignty, the question of political identity took precedence over that of regional identity; a trend confirmed by the October 1937 local elections.

The local elections and the return of the right

Despite the apparent status quo demonstrated by the right's victory at the elections, a closer examination of the results reveals important changes in Mosellan electoral behaviour. The first notable change appeared on the left with

the rise of the PCF and SFIO votes. While the Independent Socialists decreased from 14,500 in 1936 to just under 7,000 in October 1937, both the Communist and the Socialist votes increased.⁷⁰⁹ After two new PCF candidates were elected at the *Conseil Général*, Thorez observed that the Moselle was the only industrial *département* where the party was succeeding in winning seats in the local assembly for the first time.⁷¹⁰ But despite the two Communist candidates, the SFIO appeared as the clear winner.

Having never won more than 7 percent of the vote since the split with the Communists in 1920, the Socialist vote increased from roughly 1,500 in 1936 (1 percent) to almost 12,500 in 1937 (10 percent). In comparison, the Communists totalled 23,000 votes (20 percent).⁷¹¹ These figures led the *préfet* to note that the increase of the SFIO vote was the elections' most significant outcome. As he wrote, '*le fait essentiel qui se dégage de ces chiffres est incontestablement les gains considérables enregistrés par le parti socialiste SFIO.*'⁷¹² The *préfet*'s initial reaction was to link the rise of the SFIO to the decline of the Independent Socialists, whose vote halved since 1936. As he wrote,

*Les changements apportés à la situation numérique des formations de gauche ... autre que la Parti Communiste, est due, semble-t-il, beaucoup plus à une évolution interne dans le cadre d'une même doctrine, marquée, notamment, par les écarts entre les suffrages socialistes indépendants et socialistes SFIO de 1936 à 1937, qu'à une accentuation véritable des opinions du corps électoral tout entier.*⁷¹³

But in a subsequent report, he appeared to have changed his mind as he linked the Socialist party's rise with the decline of the PCF. As he noted, '*il faut*

⁷⁰⁹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 11 octobre 1937, 98AL1069-1.

⁷¹⁰ AN, Thorez papers, 'Liste des départements industriels où nous avons des élus cantonaux pour la première fois', nd, 626AP155.

⁷¹¹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 11 octobre 1937, 98AL1069-1. Thorez estimated the Communist vote at roughly 26,000 ; in AN, Thorez papers, 'Tableau, Récapitulation des élections', nd, 626AP155.

⁷¹² ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 11 octobre 1937, 98AL1069-1.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*

retenir...l'évolution des électeurs d'extrême-gauche abandonnant le parti communiste pour la parti socialiste SFIO.⁷¹⁴ And,

Le parti communiste ... reste certes l'élément majoritaire du Rassemblement Populaire en Moselle.... Mais s'il a enregistré des gains dans ... les centres industriels du bassin sidérurgique et minier de Thionville, il a par contre subi dans certains ... cantons ... industriels des pertes [qui] ont profité au parti socialiste S.F.I.O.⁷¹⁵

Even though it is impossible to determine with certainty which of the Communist or the Independent Socialist electorate boosted the SFIO's results, the *préfet* was correct to claim that the PCF was in decline by late 1937. Despite the election of two new Communist councillors, the Mosellan Communist federation was slowly losing supporters in some industrial centres.

During a meeting of the Communist section of the Vallée de l'Orne, Augustin Warocquy, a leading member of the *départementale* CGT and PCF, acknowledged that despite the recent Communist gains at the local elections, there was no denying the rise of the SFIO. As the *préfet* reported, '*M. Warocquy ... déclara ... le Parti Socialiste grandit et cette poussée n'est pas sans danger.*'⁷¹⁶

Later, during his tour of some of the *département's* industrial towns, Warocquy reported to the party's Central Committee that the SFIO and Béron ran successful campaigns against the party in the region of West Thionville. As he wrote, '*En ce qui concerne les socialistes, avec Flocart, secrétaire de la fédération de la Moselle, ... [ils] mènent une grande campagne contre nous en accord avec Béron.*'⁷¹⁷ According to Warocquy, the only way the PCF could counteract the Socialists' recent successes were to recruit new local officials who could speak French. As he noted, '*J'insiste tout particulièrement que dans la région de la Moselle, il nous faut (sic) des camarades sachant bien le français, car c'est justement cela qui est une force pour le PS.*'⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁴ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 19 octobre 1937, 98AL1069-1.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁶ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 29 novembre 1937, 98AL1089.

⁷¹⁷ ADSSD, 'Rapport d'Augustin Warocquy sur sa tournée du 6 au 20 mars 1938, le 21 mars 1938', 3Mi6/137 séquence 844.

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*

The extent to which German was used by Mosellan activists and whether or not its use by party leaders was detrimental to the party remains unknown. To complicate matters further, of the two candidates elected at the cantonal elections, one was in Metz in the Francophone zone, the other in Saint-Avold, which was predominantly German-speaking. It is therefore difficult to determine how much of the Communist support was French or German-speaking. What remains certain, however, is that after almost twenty years since the return of the Moselle to French sovereignty, the question of language and the associated difficulties it had created for the PCF had not disappeared. Throughout the interwar period, local authorities compiled language tables and according to their figures, 25 percent of the Mosellan population spoke only French in 1936.⁷¹⁹ Those who spoke only German found mostly in the zones around Forbach and along the border with the Saarland, represented 8 percent of the population. The vast majority of Mosellans used the local Platt dialect which, according to where it was used, was Latin or German. The authorities estimated the total number of dialect speakers at roughly 422,000; 60 percent of the total population.

Although useful, these statistics should be used with caution, since they fail to address the issue of multilingualism and the vast numbers who could speak more than one language – often French and Platt or German and French and Platt - which is an essential part of the linguistic map of the region in the mid-1930s. Be that as it may, the decline of the PCF in the region of Hayange cannot be attributed solely to a lack of Francophone leaders. In the region of Cattenom, where dialect speakers dominated, and in Forbach, a largely dialect and German-speaking area, the influence of the SFIO also grew, thus suggesting that Warocquy's claim that the PCF could counteract the SFIO by recruiting French-speaking officials was not entirely valid. The reasons for the rise of the SFIO and the decline of the PCF were to be found elsewhere, as Warocquy himself later acknowledged.

⁷¹⁹ ADBR, 'Statistique des Langues en 1936 – Alsace et Lorraine', nd, 98AL614.

By 1937-38, the Mosellan Communist federation was once again going through a series of internal crises. The first crisis had to do with the leadership of the federation who, according to the *préfet*, was disorganised, apathetic and incoherent.⁷²⁰ Warocquy's view confirmed the *préfet*'s as he wrote in an internal report, '*Il y a certaines sections comme Audun-le-Tiche ou Florange, dont les responsables sont absolument incapables, qui demandent à être modifiées.*'⁷²¹ He also criticised the Metz section, which he called '*la plus défectueuse [des sections]*', and the section of Ban Saint-Martin, where '*règne le doriotisme.*'⁷²² Following the 1936 elections and the emergence of left-wing political militancy in the Moselle, the *départementale* federation appeared in agreement with the Central Committee and seemed to have forsaken its old separatist and particularist tendencies. Gone were the days when the regional federation sought to operate as an independent entity, separate from the PCF. After the Mosellan section broke with Alsace in 1935, thus becoming a regional federation, local leaders largely followed the party's strategy and effectively led the *départementale* Popular Front. But in reaction to the dislocation of the national Popular Front, which they interpreted as a failure of the Popular Front strategy, some Mosellan Communists seemed to revert to their old particularist ways, thus threatening the unity of the *départementale* federation.

During the federation's annual Congress in Hagondange on 11 and 12 December 1937, party delegates appeared confused and at odds. While some believed the federation should strictly follow the Central Committee's directives, others questioned the validity of the Popular Front tactics suggesting the party should return to its sectarian ways in order to avoid a split. As the *préfet* noted,

Il apparait que les dirigeants mosellans hésitent à donner des directives précises. Sans doute, sont-ils ... pris entre la nécessité d'une politique de temporisation et de satisfaction mitigées dans le

⁷²⁰ ADBR, Rapport mensuel du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 25 décembre 1937, 98AL634.

⁷²¹ ADSSD, 'Rapport d'Augustin Warocquy sur sa tournée du 7 au 26 juin 1938, Moyeuve-Grande le 27 juin 1938', 3 Mi6/137 séquence 844.

⁷²² ADSSD, 'Rapport d'Augustin Warocquy sur sa tournée du 6 au 20 mars 1938, le 21 mars 1938', 3 Mi6/137 séquence 844.

*cadre du programme du Rassemblement Populaire, et les exigences d'une doctrine rigide à laquelle tiennent encore des militants convaincus ... [des risques] d'une éclatante rupture.*⁷²³

The Mosellan leadership's inability to agree on a clear line led to a lack of direction, the absence of which was stated in Warocquy and the *préfet's* aforementioned reports. Because of its lack of direction, the party was unable to lead its cells and sections, which led to a certain loss of coherence and unity. Another explanation for the Communist decline was the financial difficulties it faced in 1937-38. The *préfet*, whose hostility towards the PCF was no secret, accused section leaders of stealing from the party's coffers and blamed them for the federation's financial difficulties. As he wrote, '*des cadres ... auraient la fâcheuse propension à ne pas distinguer entre la Caisse de la Cellule et leurs ressources personnelles, pour le plus grand préjudice de celle-là.*'⁷²⁴

How accurate the *préfet's* accusations were may possibly never be known. The fact remains, however, that the federation was in real financial troubles. With the operating costs of *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine* spiralling out of control, the federation faced losing its bilingual publication and called for the Central Committee to help. According to the *préfet*, the federation faced a 25,000 franc deficit in late 1937.⁷²⁵ While the *préfet* accused local leaders of stealing from the party, Warocquy revealed that the difficulties faced by *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine* originated largely from the fact that some sections did not pay their contributions to the newspaper. He cited the example of the section of Florange, who owed 500 francs.⁷²⁶ Before the federation's inability to raise the money needed to save *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine*, Warocquy asked for the party's help, claiming that '*les camarades se fatiguent, et il est grand temps que le parti*

⁷²³ ADBR, Rapport mensuel du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 25 décembre 1937, 98AL634.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁶ ADSSD, Rapport d'Augustin Warocquy sur sa tournée du 7 au 26 juin 1938, Moyeuve-Grande le 27 juin 1938, 3 Mi6/137 séquence 844.

*vienne à notre secours autrement tout ce que nous avons construit risque de s'écrouler.*⁷²⁷

Sensing the gravity of the situation, the Central Committee responded favourably and sent Emile Dutilleul, Communist deputy for the Seine, to Strasbourg. By the time Dutilleul arrived in July 1938, the company who published *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine*, the Société d'Édition et de Distribution d'Alsace-Lorraine, was accumulating monthly losses of roughly 9,000 francs.⁷²⁸ According to the *préfet* of the Bas-Rhin, the deficit was largely due to the rising operational costs of the Communist newspaper.⁷²⁹ During his visit, Dutilleul informed local Communist leaders that they would have to cut the newspaper's operating costs by reducing the headcount, raising the price of the daily by 10 centimes and that of the subscription by 75 centimes as well as removing two pages of the newspaper twice a week. More to the point, he declared that the Alsatian federation would have to solve the crisis itself as the Central Committee was not prepared to support a newspaper written in German. As the *préfet* noted, '*M. Dutilleul aurait informé les dirigeants alsaciens du Parti communiste, qu'aucune subvention ne serait plus accordée par le Comité Central aux organes de langue allemande.*'⁷³⁰

Even though the Mosellan federation did not depend on the Bas-Rhin federation, Dutilleul made his comments to the latter because it was responsible for the publication of the Strasbourg-based newspaper. The party's decision not to help *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine* because of its use of German was in keeping with its decision not to admit Germans into the Mosellan sections in late 1936 (see chapter Four). Trying to rid the party of its past links with autonomous Germanophile elements and eager to demonstrate its rejection of anything German, and therefore fascist, the Central Committee was prepared to abandon the local newspaper to its fate. This is particularly interesting because it brings to mind the troubled relations between the party's national federation and the local

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁸ ADBR, Rapport du préfet du Bas-Rhin au vice-président du Conseil, Strasbourg, 12 juillet 1938, 98AL1089.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*

sections in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when the party split in Strasbourg in 1929 and when Friedrich wrote to the Comintern asking for the independence of the regional federation. It is also interesting to note that while the Central Committee refused to support its German-speaking readership, it still actively sought the support of Mosellan Catholics, regardless of their linguistic habits.

The policy of the *main tendue* was very much advocated by the Central Committee, but in the Moselle, the Action Catholique Lorraine and the Union Républicaine Lorraine repeatedly warned Catholic workers against it. As a devout Catholic, Schuman was one of the most vocal opponents of the *main tendue*. After the Action Catholique Lorraine's annual congress in Metz in March 1938, the *préfet* reported that '*M. Schuman mit en garde la classe ouvrière croyante contre la politique de la main tendue*'.⁷³¹ Thus, while the PCF sent messages of unity to the population at large, the sectarianism it practiced internally challenged its own unity and stability.

Although it has not been possible to establish how the Central Committee's decision not to support *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine* affected the Mosellan federation, three conclusions may be drawn from it. Firstly, it denotes a certain lack of understanding of local realities on the Central Committee's part. After all, unlike the Socialists, the Communists had always preferred to communicate in German. The fact that *L'Humanité d'Alsace-Lorraine* was still largely published in German indicated that the editorial team as well as the readership were probably more comfortable with German than French. What is more, in some parts of the Moselle, Communist candidates seemed to prefer using German. As a matter of fact, Muller, the newly-elected councillor in the canton of Saint-Avold, spoke very little French and communicated mainly in German. Secondly, by abandoning the regional newspaper to its own fate, the Central Committee was denying the linguistic and cultural specificity of the Alsatian and Mosellan federations, thus running the risk of resuscitating the latter's old particularist ways. The third conclusion that may be drawn also carried heavy political consequences. By

⁷³¹ AN, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 8 mars 1938, F7/14614.

deciding not to help the regional newspaper, the Central Committee's decision may have led to the decline of the Mosellan federation and aggravated the crisis of confidence that shook it. As the *préfet* noted, this may have led to the rise of its traditional political rival, the SFIO. As he wrote in a report, '*Il n'est pas exclu ... de penser que le Parti socialiste pourra profiter dans une certaine mesure de cette ... désagrégation.... Son influence s'accroît lentement, mais sûrement semble-t-il.*'⁷³²

As the Mosellan Communist federation appeared weakened by its financial and internal difficulties, the other two parties comprising the Popular Front, the Radical-Socialist party and the SFIO, began to question their association with the Popular Front. In no doubt as to the doomed future of the left-wing coalition, they dissociated themselves from both the Communists and the Popular Front. For the small Mosellan Radical-Socialist section, like the national party, associating with the Communists signified working against the current Radical-led government of Daladier. After Blum resigned in June 1937, the Radical Chautemps headed two different Popular Front governments until March 1938, when Blum briefly returned to office, only to be replaced by Daladier in April. Right-wing Radicals had always opposed their party's association with the Communists. But Daladier, after having led the party on the path of unity with the PCF and the SFIO within the Popular Front at the risk of alienating some within the party, had sincerely supported the coalition. As he declared during a party meeting in July 1936, '*Le parti Radical-socialiste ... a la fierté ... d'avoir scellé l'alliance du Tiers-Etat avec les prolétaires.... Il est décidé à demeurer fidèle à son serment.*'⁷³³ Two years later, facing the Sudeten crisis and the threat of an imminent war with Germany, Daladier's oath to the Popular Front appeared outdated, as his attitude towards the coalition and the Communists in particular gradually changed.

Since events in Central Europe threatened an imminent war in Europe, Daladier believed that France needed urgently to alter course. Consequently, his main objective was to pacify the country and increase the production of

⁷³² ADBR, Rapport mensuel du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 25 décembre 1937, 98AL634.

⁷³³ CHSPo, Genebrier papers, 'Discours prononcé par M. Daladier, Président du parti Radical-Socialiste', 14 juillet 1936, GE6.

armaments in order to prepare the country for war, both materially and psychologically. As he stated during a party meeting on 15 June 1938,

*nous ne pouvons accepter que dans les périls de l'heure présente, notre pays risque d'être mis en état d'infériorité par une diminution croissante de sa capacité de production. Il n'y pas de progrès social durable s'il n'est point affermi et fortifié par le progrès économique.*⁷³⁴

Without going into detail, as the subject of Germany and its effect on French and Mosellan politics shall be examined later in this chapter, it is fair to say that Daladier's policies and his propensity to legislate by decrees effectively broke the already fragile Popular Front. Following the Socialists' refusal to enter his government in April, Daladier gave ministries to fellow Radicals, including Jean Zay, a strong supporter of the Popular Front, and Georges Bonnet, a notorious opponent. But he also gave the right the opportunity to return to government by including Paul Reynaud from the Alliance Démocratique, Champetier de Ribes from the Parti Démocrate Populaire and Georges Mandel from the Républicains Indépendants. As Wolikow writes, '*Le gouvernement constitué le 10 avril sous la Présidence de Daladier marquait à l'évidence une ouverture à droite*'.⁷³⁵

By August 1938, when Daladier declared that '*il faut remettre la France au travail*' and '*aménager la loi de quarante heures*' in the national defence industry, he was clearly prepared to take on the CGT.⁷³⁶ As Julian Jackson writes, 'by announcing the necessity to end the forty-hour week on the grounds that it was hindering rearmament.... Daladier's main objective was to pick a fight with the unions and win.'⁷³⁷ Not surprisingly, the CGT reacted vigorously to his declaration. The Confédération argued that the Radical leader was forsaking the oath he had made on 14 July 1935 and the programme of the Popular Front.⁷³⁸ Blum, keen to maintain the unity of the coalition but not at any cost, declared,

⁷³⁴ CHSPo, Genebrier papers, 'Allocution de M. Daladier, Président du Conseil, au Comité Exécutif du Parti Radical Socialiste' 15 juin 1938, GE6.

⁷³⁵ Wolikow, *op.cit.*, p.270.

⁷³⁶ CHSPo, Genebrier papers, 'Allocution radiodiffusée prononcée par M. Edouard Daladier Président du Conseil, 21 août 1938', GE7.

⁷³⁷ Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.99.

⁷³⁸ Wolikow, *op.cit.*, p.272. Grandmougin, *op.cit.*, p.412.

*Nous ne chercherons pas exploiter contre M. Daladier les difficultés qu'il vient de se créer lui-même; l'heure est trop grave pour cela. Mais... [p]our un recul de la législation sociale ... qu'il ne compte pas sur le Parti socialiste.*⁷³⁹

Although the Communists did not condemn Daladier directly, they criticised his alleged concession to the *200 familles* by amending what they considered one of the hallmarks of the 1936 social laws: the 40-hour week. As a document published by the Politburo stated on 8 September,

*On peut s'étonner de l'empressement avec lequel le Président du Conseil a déféré à la volonté des 200 familles, qu'il fustigeait naguère et qui veulent abolir une des principales conquêtes du Front populaire: la semaine de quarante heures.*⁷⁴⁰

As was often the case with the PCF, its position was ambivalent. Torn between its goal of uniting the working classes in a single party under its command and its commitment to the Popular Front, it urged the working masses to follow the instructions of the CGT, thus challenging the government's labour policies, while at the same time remaining united behind the Popular Front. As the same document affirmed,

*C'est ... un appel à l'union ... des communistes, des socialistes, des radicaux, des démocrates, des chrétiens, union de la Nation Française contre ses ennemis de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur, pour sauvegarder le progrès social...*⁷⁴¹

When the left and the right unanimously endorsed Daladier in office at the National Assembly, thus creating what appeared to be a broad political consensus, the Mosellan Radicals grew confident that time was ripe for them to detach themselves from the Popular Front.⁷⁴² In early 1937, when the Radical party still largely supported the Popular Front, the *préfet* reported the formation of a new

⁷³⁹ Grandmougin, *op.cit.*, p.413.

⁷⁴⁰ 'Pour la défense de la paix et des conquêtes sociales', Procès-verbal du Bureau Politique du Parti Communiste Français, séance du 8 septembre 1938, *Cahiers du Bolchévisme*, documents du parti, No 10, octobre 1938, p.707.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴² The National Assembly invested Daladier with 575 votes against 5. The Senate granted him the full financial powers they had previously denied Blum by 508 votes against 12. Grandmougin, *op.cit.*, p.403.

Radical section in Dieuze, a small town located in rural Francophone Moselle.⁷⁴³ Upon the creation of the section, members sent Blum, the then Premier, a motion affirming their confidence in the Popular Front. But in July 1938, as relations between the three coalition parties seriously deteriorated, the Radical federation of the Moselle decided to boycott Popular Front meetings, which, more often than not, were organised by the Communists.

In Thionville, leaders of the local section rejected the Communists' invitation to a meeting of the *départemental* committee of the Popular Front. They refused on the basis that, as the *préfet* reported, they no longer wished to associate with '*les représentants d'un parti qui ne cesse de se livrer à de multiples attaques contre le Gouvernement actuel.*'⁷⁴⁴ Even though the SFIO did not formally reject the Communist invitation, it followed a similar line and stopped participating in the *départemental* reunions.⁷⁴⁵ Thus, the PCF found itself isolated and in charge of a coalition now comprised largely of Communists and CGT trade unionists.

Although the latter still supported the Popular Front, its decreasing influence among the workers meant that the coalition reached fewer and fewer people. As industry bosses regained their confidence and did not hesitate to dismiss troublesome workers, the latter, fearing for their jobs and having tired of what seemed like endless political action, began to distance themselves from the CGT. The Confédération, keen to maintain its central role in the workplace and its ascendancy over the workforce and to a certain extent management, intensified its propaganda by organising meetings across the *département*. But faced with the possibility of losing their jobs and being accused of harbouring antipatriotic feelings by refusing to participate in the national effort, very few workers responded to the CGT's calls. As the *préfet* noted in a report, '*divers meetings syndicaux ... n'ont été suivis ... que par de faibles auditoires, en rien comparables de ceux de 1936.*'⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴³ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au sous-secrétaire d'état à la présidence du Conseil chargé des affaires d'Alsace et de Lorraine, Metz, 2 mars 1937, 98AL673-2

⁷⁴⁴ ADBR, Rapport mensuel du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 10 août 1938, 98AL634.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

The small number of workers present at the Confédération's meetings reflected its declining influence in the Moselle. After its rapid rise in 1936 and despite the fact that it counted 82,000 fee-paying members in 1938, the Confédération struggled to motivate its troops.⁷⁴⁷ On the rare occasions that it succeeded in mobilising support, the stakes were high enough for workers to become involved in union activities. For example, after having renewed its collective contracts in May 1938, the Thionville-based steelworkers union succeeded in mobilising the support of 30,000 workers in disputes over pay. No strike was called, but unable to negotiate a deal between the bosses and the union representatives, the *préfet* referred the matter to the minister of Labour. As he reported,

*Je vous serais très obligé de bien vouloir envisager la possibilité de déférer le différend à la Commission Nationale de conciliation, eu égard à l'importance du conflit et au nombre important de travailleurs entrant en compte (plus de 30.000).*⁷⁴⁸

Episodes as this one, however, were rare and in August 1938 the *préfet* noted that the CGT's calls for a large strike movement in October met with much indifference and even some hostility. As he wrote, '*Leurs déclarations ont rencontré l'apathie générale si ce n'est même une certaine hostilité*'.⁷⁴⁹ In September, following Daladier's declaration that France should return to work, the CGT protested against the Premier's plans to amend the forty-hour week legislation and warned workers against the government's plans.⁷⁵⁰ But it found a general lack of interest and apathy within its own ranks. To make matters worse, the CGT also faced the rising popularity of the Christian trade unions in industrial centres.

In 1936, the Christian unions counted roughly 5,000 members.⁷⁵¹ By October 1938, the number had shot up to 22,000.⁷⁵² Supported by the Action

⁷⁴⁷ ADM, Note à Monsieur le chef de la 5^e Division, Metz, 21 octobre 1938, 26Z3.

⁷⁴⁸ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre du Travail, Metz, 25 juin 1938, 98AL675.

⁷⁴⁹ ADBR, Rapport mensuel du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 10 août 1938, 98AL634.

⁷⁵⁰ ADBR, rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 7 septembre 1938, 98AL878.

⁷⁵¹ AN, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 17 mai 1938, F7/14614.

⁷⁵² ADM, 'Note à Monsieur le chef de la 5^e Division', Metz, 21 octobre 1938, 26Z3.

Catholique Lorraine, the Union Républicaine Lorraine and the clergy at large, they were particularly interested in removing workers from the influence of the CGT. Invited by the Action Catholique Lorraine to speak at its annual congress in March 1938, Jean Le Cour Grandmaison, the vice-president of the Fédération Nationale Catholique, claimed that, as the *préfet* put it in a report, '*le syndicalisme chrétien permet d'agir sur le terrain professionnel en restaurant la famille et la corporation.*'⁷⁵³ He was backed by Schuman who proclaimed '*qu'il y avait une incompatibilité absolue entre la foi chrétienne et les tendances de ... certains syndicats.*' Although the CGT could do little against public attacks, it became particularly frustrated to hear that priests made similar attacks during their private dominical sermons.

In a letter to the *préfet*, the Mosellan CGT expressed its '*indignation contre l'attaque que mène ... le clergé de l'église catholique contre la Confédération Générale du Travail, profitant de la chaire et de l'église pour inviter nos camarades à sortir de la CGT.*'⁷⁵⁴ Citing the example of the canton of Bitche, where priests refused to give absolution to women whose husbands refused to leave the CGT, the author of the letter protested that the clergy used unlawful means to press their flock to leave the CGT and join the Christian unions. As *fonctionnaires* – the clergy in the Moselle and Alsace was, and still is, paid by the French state – the letter complained of the fact that '*des fonctionnaires payés par la République aient le droit pendant leurs heures de travail de faire de la propagande contre une organisation quelconque en faveur des syndicats chrétiens.*'⁷⁵⁵ As the union claimed that its previous letters had remained unanswered, the author warned the *préfet* that '*nous sommes bien décidés ... de sortir de la ligne de conduite que nous avons eue jusqu'à présent si cette activité de la part du clergé lorrain ne doit pas cesser.*' What '*sortir de la ligne de conduite*' referred to remains unclear, but as the local CGT evidently received no answer from the *préfet*, it escalated the matter to the central offices of the trade union in Paris, who sent a copy of the

⁷⁵³ AN, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 8 mars 1938, F7/14614.

⁷⁵⁴ ADBR, Lettre de la CGT au préfet de la Moselle, nd but thought to be written in October-novembre 1938, 98AL675.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

letter to Chautemps, the then Vice-Premier and head of the *Direction générale des services d'Alsace et de Lorraine*.⁷⁵⁶

Alerted by a letter from Chautemps, the *préfet* replied that he was aware of the situation and that he had contacted the new bishop of Metz, Monseigneur Heintz, and the secretary-general of the local CGT in late October.⁷⁵⁷ In his letter to Heintz, he recommended the bishop inform his missionaries to '*maintenir la religion au-dessus des préoccupations temporelles, d'ordre politique ou syndical*'.⁷⁵⁸ In his letter to CGT official, the *préfet* affirmed that he had heard of the clergy's abuses in Bitche and that he would urge the bishop to investigate the trade union's claims.⁷⁵⁹ In his long response to the *préfet*, the bishop posed as the apostle of the Catholic Church's social doctrine. Without refuting the accusations made against his priests, whose actions he defended, he claimed that they had a moral duty to enlighten workers who came to the Church for moral guidance.

Quoting the Church's view on professional associations and in line with Pope Pie XI's recent encyclical letter, *Divini redemptoris*, which defined Communism as destructive, he affirmed that '*la question sociale, et avant tout, la question du travail, n'est pas une question purement matérielle et économique, mais aussi une question humaine, intéressant la dignité, la conscience humaine et la morale*'.⁷⁶⁰ What the Vatican and Heintz meant was that the Church had the moral duty to keep the Catholic masses, in particular workers, away from the virus of Socialism and Communism. As one of the advanced posts of Communism in the professional world, the CGT had to be fought. As Heintz wrote,

c'est le devoir d'un évêque et de son clergé d'éclairer les Catholiques qui attendent d'eux lumière et direction, en déclarant que les syndicats d'inspiration socialiste ou communiste ne sont pas faits pour eux et de les engager à choisir ... des syndicats conformes

⁷⁵⁶ ADBR, Lettre de la CGT à M. Camille Chautemps, vice-président du Conseil, Paris, 8 novembre 1938, 98AL675.

⁷⁵⁷ ADBR, Lettre du préfet au vice-président du Conseil, Metz, 14 novembre 1938, 98AL675. Monseigneur Heintz replaced Monseigneur Pelt as bishop of Metz in April 1938. The latter died in December 1937.

⁷⁵⁸ ADBR, Copie de la lettre envoyée à Monseigneur Heintz, Metz, 29 octobre 1938, 98AL675.

⁷⁵⁹ ADBR, Copie de la lettre envoyée au secrétariat général de la CGT, Metz, 29 octobre 1938, 98AL675

⁷⁶⁰ ADBR, Lettre de Monseigneur Heintz au préfet, Metz, 30 novembre 1938, 98AL675.

*à l'esprit et à la morale du christianisme. Tant que la C.G.T. sera ce qu'elle est, ils ne peuvent pas agir autrement, sans faillir à leur mission.*⁷⁶¹

Due to the lack of sources, it has not been possible to establish the conclusion of this confrontational story. It is therefore difficult to say how the relations between the CGT and the diocese and the Christian unions subsequently developed. How much direct influence the clergy had on Mosellan Catholic workers in 1937-1938 is also difficult to measure, but it is clear that the local CGT, which was losing support among industrial workers, took the clergy's propaganda seriously. While the attitude of the diocese towards the Socialist and Communist doctrines should come as no surprise, the Church and the clergy having long condemned the influence of left-wing trade unions on workers, the tone employed by Heintz in his letter expressed remarkable confidence. Indeed, compared to Monseigneur Pelt's previous exchanges with the *préfet* on the troubled relations between the clergy and the CGT, Heintz appeared more assertive and prepared to defend his clergy. In September 1936, the *préfet* reported to Pelt, the then bishop, the case of a priest who used his pulpit to attack the Popular Front government.⁷⁶² Pelt, who initially defended his priest for promoting the Church's social doctrine, concluded his letter by conceding that he '*n'[a] pas manqué de recommander sérieusement à ce prêtre d'éviter ... ce qui pourrait être considéré comme une allusion politique*'.⁷⁶³

Why the changed attitude? Even though the different personalities of the two bishops certainly played a part, other factors may explain the diocese's new assurance. In 1936 the bishop's expectations of the first Popular Front government with regards to the Church – given that the new majority was left-wing and supported by the Communists, would there be plans to laicise the *département*? – possibly led him to treat the new government with caution, hence his readiness to

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶² ADBR, Lettre du préfet au directeur des Cultes à Strasbourg, Metz, 30 septembre 1936, 98AL1764.

⁷⁶³ ADBR, Lettre de l'Evêque de Metz au directeur des Cultes à Strasbourg, Metz, 7 octobre 1936, 98AL1764.

compromise. By 1938, however, things were different. The school reform, which stirred much reaction among Mosellan politicians, had been scrapped by the *Conseil d'Etat* in December 1937, giving local Catholics the sentiment to have won a victory over the Popular Front and having the implicit support of the guards of the French Constitution. What is more, Daladier's government appeared more sympathetic to Catholics than it did to the godless CGT. While the Premier was eager to normalise France's relations with the Vatican, even talking of a second Concordat, he was bent on breaking the labour movement. Added to this was the fact that the right in general, including the Church, grew more confident vis-à-vis the labour movement and the weakened Popular Front.

Interestingly, Heintz's attack on the CGT was written on 30 November 1938. That same day the trade union launched a fateful general strike in reaction to the Minister of Finances' decrees that constituted a repudiation of the programme of the Popular Front. As a conservative, Reynaud, the Finance Minister, was adamant that the only way to increase the production of armament and restore confidence in the government was to extend the forty-hour week to forty-eight hours, thus ending what he called '*la semaine des deux dimanches*'.⁷⁶⁴ On the day of the strike, the government and the *patronat*, who were much more organised than in 1936, treated the strikers severely.⁷⁶⁵ As the police forcibly evacuated occupied factories, bosses sacked 15,000 strikers.⁷⁶⁶ The French philosopher Simone Weil described the *patronat*'s treatment of the strikers on 30 November as '*la bataille de la Marne des patrons*'.⁷⁶⁷ For Prost, '*La répression ... est délibérée, systématique, massive et d'une rare sévérité*'.⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁴ Grandmougin, *op.cit.*, p.436.

⁷⁶⁵ On the subject of the patronat and their union, the Confédération Générale du Patronat Français, see Ingo Kolboom, *op.cit.*

⁷⁶⁶ Michel Dreyfus, *Histoire de la CGT: cent ans de syndicalisme en France*, Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1995, p.185.

⁷⁶⁷ Quoted in Berstein, *op.cit.*, p.149. Berstein does not provide the source of the quotation nor does he list Weil's work in the bibliography.

⁷⁶⁸ Prost, 'Le Climat Social', in René Rémond et Janine Bourdin (dir.), *Edouard Daladier, Chef de Gouvernement Avril 1938-Septembre 1939*, Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1977, p.107.

In the Moselle, official sources pertaining to the general strike are scarce as many reports dated between October 1938 and February 1939 are missing – according to local archivists, this was the work of the new German rulers who, after annexing the *département* in July 1940, used police reports to locate local ‘reds’. A small number of prefectural reports, however, give an indication as to what happened in the *département* on 30 November. As at the national level, Mosellan bosses treated the strikers severely. A few days before the strike, they gathered their workforce and threatened them with dismissal should they be absent from work on 30 November without a valid reason.⁷⁶⁹ Even though he did not provide exact numbers, the *préfet* stated that ‘*la grève ... n’a ... connu, dans mon Département, qu’un succès relatif.*’⁷⁷⁰ The day after the strike, bosses invited all the workers who had gone on strike and lost their jobs for an individual interview. Of those workers, whose number is also unknown, 146 were not re-hired and lost their jobs definitively.

In one of his studies of the strike, Prost writes that ‘*cette procédure permet surtout d’effectuer un tri, et donc de licencier tous les meneurs.*’⁷⁷¹ Pressed by the CGT, the *préfet* tried to persuade management to re-hire the sacked workers but they refused. As at the national level, Mosellan bosses seized the opportunity to break the CGT and rid their factories of unwanted elements. The *préfet*’s report confirmed this, as he wrote: ‘*étant donné qu’il s’agit d’ouvriers dont, depuis longtemps, les Entreprises cherchaient à se débarrasser et qu’elles considéraient comme des meneurs et des violents, je me suis heurté ... à des refus.*’⁷⁷²

Although the CGT in late 1938 was larger in terms of unions and individual members than in June 1936, it was soon broken by the government and the *patronat*. Dreyfus writes that the CGT rapidly lost one quarter of its members after 30 November.⁷⁷³ Prost notes that there were no strikes in 1939. This was true for the Moselle. Since the number of workers who left the Mosellan trade union

⁷⁶⁹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre du Travail, Metz, 20 février 1939, 98AL878.

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷¹ Prost, ‘Le Climat Social’, p.109.

⁷⁷² ADBR, rapport du préfet au ministre du Travail, Metz, 20 février 1939, 98AL878.

⁷⁷³ Dreyfus, *op.cit.*, p.187.

remains unknown, it is difficult to comment on the effect of the strike on the local union. What remains certain, however, is that the CGT began to lose its influence on the workers long before 30 November. It is therefore likely that the national CGT's fast-declining membership after December 1938 was mirrored in the Moselle.

As for the local *patronat*, it appeared to act as one. Back in May 1938, bosses had shown their intransigence and self-confidence by opposing the CGT during the negotiations over pay in the Thionville steelworks. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the steelworks union represented 30,000 workers. If workers had decided to go on strike, a large share of French steel production would have stopped and without doubt the factories would have lost revenue. But in 1938, there was more at stake than revenue and profit for bosses. The latter wanted to regain their authority and restore social order in their factories and in society in general. For this reason they treated the workers severely. Although it is not known if the local *patronat* really worked in concert prior and during the strike, the dismissals of union leaders gave the CGT and workers a strong signal that the days when the unions controlled the shop floors were over. On the right, reactions were unanimous: social order was restored and 30 November was a success. Almost five years since the last general strike of 12 February, which had led to the uniting of the left in the Popular Front, the right appeared to have defeated the left.

Of particular significance was the fact that the right did not even need to unite to defeat the left. In the Moselle, the Front Lorrain had ceased to function in early 1938. Eiselé, the young lawyer in charge of the movement, left Metz to complete his military service in March. As for Ritz, his poor health kept him away from politics and the Front Lorrain until his untimely death in January 1939. By late 1938, it had no reason to be as its nemesis, the PCF, was in the opposition and in crisis.⁷⁷⁴ Once the fastest growing political force in the Moselle, the Parti Social Français was in difficulty in 1938. As internal dissensions began to appear in conjunction with the affair of the secret funds, its growth slowed down in late 1937.

⁷⁷⁴ By refusing to vote for the Munich agreements at the National Assembly, the PCF left the majority group on 4 October 1938.

In July 1937, one month after de la Rocque had rejected the Front de la Liberté, Pozzo di Borgo accused de la Rocque of having accepted secret government funds for the Croix de Feu in the early 1930s. De la Rocque, who repeatedly claimed that the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français were above the political conflict, sued his former deputy. The trial, which took place in Lyon offered, what Julian Jackson describes as, 'the spectacle of the right washing its dirty linen in public.'⁷⁷⁵ The effect of the trials was felt in the Moselle where Andres, the regional leader of the Parti Social Français, told his followers to trust de la Rocque and warned them against Pozzo di Borgo's lies. After the Metz section's annual gathering on 16 December, the *préfet* wrote in a report that Andres '*s'efforça de démontrer que le Président du Parti n'avait jamais émargé aux fonds secrets et conclut que ... [les accusations de Pozzo di Borgo] étaient mensongères.*'⁷⁷⁶ Criticising Marin, Henriot and Vallat for supporting Pozzo di Borgo, Andres added that the regional federation would never allow them to speak in the Moselle again. He then concluded that anyone in disagreement with him or suspicious of de la Rocque should leave the party within a fortnight. It appears that this was just what happened as by late 1937 many decided to leave the federation. According to the *préfet*, the link to the Lyon secret funds trials was clear as he mentioned '*les symptômes consécutifs au procès de Lyon.*'⁷⁷⁷ What is more, those who left the Parti Social Français joined its arch-rival on the right, Doriot's Parti Populaire Français.

Although he never admitted publicly, one of de la Rocque's main reasons for not joining the Front de la Liberté was his fear that some of his troops might quit for Doriot's party. Ironically, his decision to remain outside the Front de la Liberté had just that effect, as defectors left the Parti Social Français for the Parti Populaire Français. As the *préfet* wrote in a report, '*il semble que les progrès numériques enregistrés par le Parti Populaire Français, au préjudice du Parti*

⁷⁷⁵ Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, p.258.

⁷⁷⁶ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 21 décembre 1937, 98AL674-1.

⁷⁷⁷ ADBR, Rapport mensuel du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 25 décembre 1937, 98AL634.

*Social Français ... aient tendance à se confirmer.*⁷⁷⁸ By February 1938, the *préfet* confirmed the Parti Social Français' decline. As he noted, '*le Parti Social Français n'a fait preuve ... que d'une activité très ralentie. Il semble que son rayonnement soit moins vif et que des défections soient à enregistrer au profit du "Parti Populaire Français"*'.⁷⁷⁹ In order to halt the defections to the Parti Populaire Français and attract new supporters, Emile Peter, the Parti Social Français deputy for Sarrebourg, even founded a new local paper called *Sarrebourg 1938*.

Still the largest party in terms of membership, the Parti Social Français ceased to grow in 1938. Although the secret funds affair slowed down the party's growth in the Moselle, it is fair to say that the breakdown of the Popular Front as well as Daladier and Reynaud's conservative policies modestly strengthened the right. As a political consensus emerged after Daladier took office in April, thus narrowing the left-right divide, there was little room for radical and extreme politics; this was true for the left and for the right. In the Moselle, this was seen during the October 1938 municipal by-election when the Parti Social Français came head to head with the Metz conservative notables: those who had created the Front Lorrain and ran the Metz Francophone dailies, *Le Lorrain* and *Le Messin*.

Following Vautrin's untimely death in September 1938, Metz had to elect a new mayor. As the mayor was elected by the municipal council, the city was to hold complementary municipal elections on 23 October. What should have been a seamless election - Vautrin had left instructions with the municipal council to elect the deputy-mayor Gabriel Hocquard as new mayor - resulted in bitter feuds between the Parti Social Français and the Metz right-wing municipal council.⁷⁸⁰ Two right-wing candidates chose to put their names forward on a joint list: Durand, the editor of *Le Lorrain* and a member of the Parti Social Français, and Wolff, a local leader of the Parti Populaire Français. Because Durand presented his candidacy without his party's approval and allied with a rival Parti Populaire Français candidate, he was dismissed from the Parti Social Français. Determined

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁹ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 24 février 1938, 98AL634.

⁷⁸⁰ Thibaud de la Corbière, *Les Maires de Metz*, Metz: Editions Serpenoises, 1995, p.185.

to present its own candidates at the elections, the Parti Social Français nominated Georges Thouveny, Andres' deputy at the party's regional offices, and Henri Velter, a local *conseiller d'arrondissement*.

As a sign of protest against the dismissal of Durand, twelve municipal councillors announced their resignation from the Parti Social Français – almost a third of the council. In a communiqué published by *Le Lorrain*, they criticised the party's sectarian policy which, as they wrote, '*divisent les Français de bonne volonté*.'⁷⁸¹ Supported by the two Francophone right-wing dailies, *Le Messin* and *Le Lorrain*, Wolff and Durand won the election. The first won a majority at the first round. But the second did not, and it was the Parti Social Français' decision to remove its candidates at the second round that gave him the election. Not surprisingly, the two new municipal councillors and the majority of the council voted for Hocquard. A few weeks later, a by-election for a seat of *conseiller général* in the third canton of Metz resulted in a similar conflict between the Parti Social Français on the one side and the Parti Populaire Français and the Metz notables on the other. As in the Metz municipal election, the Parti Social Français was defeated and the Metz notables secured the election of their preferred candidate.

Relations between the Parti Social Français and the local notables had seldom been harmonious. Despite the public displays of friendship and the fact that they shared common values - anti-Communism being the most obvious – political rivalry opposed the two organisations as they both sought the control of the conservative masses. The Parti Social Français' national electoral policy was clear: no alliances with third-party political parties. In a speech he made in late 1938, de la Rocque explained the party's policy:

Nous ne connaissons point d'adversaires parmi ceux qui sont eux-mêmes les adversaires du marxisme. Mais l'histoire de l'après-guerre nous a enseigné un tel scepticisme à l'égard de tous les

⁷⁸¹ *Le Lorrain*, 18 octobre 1938. Quoted in Colas, *op.cit.*, p.283.

*anciens partis, que nous ne sommes disposés à conclure aucune alliance générale et permanente avec l'un quelconque d'entre eux.*⁷⁸²

Such inflexible policies sometimes prove difficult to apply in the regions. It is one thing to dictate a national policy, it is quite another to apply it at the local level. This is exactly what occurred in Metz when Durand, a prominent member of the Parti Social Français, chose to run a joint list with a member of the Parti Populaire Français.

In the Moselle, the conflict between the Parti Social Français and the notables was aggravated by the decision of the Metz right-wing press to portray de la Rocque's party as, in Colas' words, '*étranger à l'esprit ... lorrain.*'⁷⁸³ Because the Parti Social Français blamed the '*anciens partis*' for virtually all the ills befalling post-war France, by extension it criticised the old conservative elites of Metz. The latter succeeded in maintaining their political and economic ascendancy by cultivating the particularism they had developed prior to and after 1918, and by controlling the press and the majority of businesses. When one of them passed away, they made sure to appoint a loyal successor to carry the torch forward. For example, Collin appointed Ritz and Vautrin, Hocquard. Because the Parti Social Français disturbed the notables' world, from which ironically it drew a large number of supporters, the Mosellan notables described it as non-Lorrainer and therefore foreign. Similar to the national right's description of the Popular Front as 'un-French' – an insinuation that the left-wing coalition was, in Wardhaugh's words, essentially 'incapable of attracting the real French people' – the Mosellan right-wing notables portrayed the Parti Social Français as un-Lorrainer.⁷⁸⁴ Obviously, the term 'foreign' did not have the connotation it had when applied to the 'reds'. But as they did with the Communists, it appeared that the notables used the term against any party threatening their political and social supremacy. By late 1938, the Popular Front had ceased to exist, leaving the left disunited and weakened. As such, it no longer represented a threat to local right wingers. It is

⁷⁸² CHSPo, de la Rocque papers, 'Extrait du discours prononcé par le Colonel de la Rocque à Carentan, le dimanche 20 novembre 1938, LR65.

⁷⁸³ Colas, *op.cit.*, p.287.

⁷⁸⁴ Wardhaugh, *op.cit.*, p.86.

therefore possible that as the Popular Front faded, it left a vacuum behind which the Parti Social Français filled albeit involuntarily.

Despite the fact that the local right-wing press tried to play the particularist card by describing the Parti Social Français as foreign, this conflict reveals to some extent the notables' resistance to letting national politics enter the Moselle. Indeed, one of the most noticeable effects of the Popular Front in the Moselle was the intrusion of national politics on the local political scene. This was particularly visible among the working masses who participated in the strikes and joined the CGT in record numbers in 1936-37. The increased membership of the latter reflected the working classes' new definition of their social and political identities. For that reason, it is fair to say that for the first time Mosellan workers entered what Benoît Kermoal called '*un espace de contestation conforme à la tradition des luttes ouvrières françaises*.'⁷⁸⁵

Reflected in the results of the 1937 local elections, new divisions cutting the *département* in two diametrically-opposed zones appeared along political and ideological lines. Because the Popular Front led to the culmination of the polarisation of society along those lines, it added a political and ideological dimension to the Moselle's old cultural and linguistic divisions and helped to assimilate the Mosellan working masses into national politics. Without renouncing their regional identity, many began to look beyond the boundaries of their region and identify themselves in terms of class within the wider national political context. But as seen earlier, with the decline of the CGT and the PCF in 1938, this new class identity was largely ephemeral.

This new political identity also existed among the conservative masses. The emergence of new right-wing parties, in particular the Parti Social Français, revealed the population's desire for new politics. As the particularist Union Républicaine Lorraine seemed unable to foster a sense of action and unity in response to the perceived threat of a Communist revolution, many turned towards the dynamic new right. But as the Popular Front broke down and the threat of a

⁷⁸⁵ Benoît Kermoal, 'Colère ouvrière à la veille du Front populaire', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, juin 2006, p.28.

Communist revolution waned, so did the people's enthusiasm for the far right and extremist politics. As the October 1937 election results indicate, the Mosellan right-wing electorate voted en masse for the conservative Union Républicaine Démocratique as it received 57,000 votes; roughly 75 percent of the right-wing vote.⁷⁸⁶ By comparison, the Parti Social Français, whose first election it was, received 13,100 (15 percent). As the school reform episode also demonstrated, the opposition to the government's decree was largely organised by the Union Républicaine Lorraine and the Action Catholique Lorraine. In 1924, Mosellan Catholics had impulsively rejected the Cartel des Gauche's plans to laicise the recovered provinces without the need of organised action. In 1937, however, they were led by organisations whose raison d'être rested on the defence of the *particularisme mosellan*. Eager to protect what they saw as key values of Mosellan distinct regional identity, Catholic politicians and the Action Catholique Lorraine probably sought to capitalise on the population's growing interest in political action. Unfortunately for them, and despite the fact that they collected hundreds of thousands of signatures in their anti-reform petition, other pressing matters pre-occupied Mosellans. Without doubt, that which caused the most concern was the issue of war against Germany.

Part Two: the German Threat and Domestic Antisemitism

The rise of the German threat

Because of the Moselle's past relationship with Germany and the fact that the two shared common borders, Hitler's military and foreign policy had an acute effect on the region. In order to examine the rise of the German threat and its effect upon French and Mosellan politics and society in the final months of the Popular Front, it is necessary to understand how the German issue gradually took centre stage in France.

⁷⁸⁶ ADBR, rapport du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 11 octobre 1937, 98AL1069-1.

Shortly after Germany's President Paul Von Hindenburg nominated Hitler as the new Chancellor on 30 January 1933, the French ambassador to Berlin, André François-Poncet, recommended caution but remained confident that should the new Chancellor claim the revision of the peace treaties with the help of Hungary and Italy, France was in a strong position. As he wrote to the French minister of the Interior in a diplomatic note,

Nous devons prévoir le cas où, le fascisme hitlérien ayant lié partie avec le fascisme italien et hongrois ... réclamer[ait] en commun la révision des traités.... Une dictature de droite telle que le Reich n'en a pas connue depuis l'armistice vient de s'installer en Allemagne.... C'est un événement grave.... En face de cette dictature la France n'a pas de raison de perdre son calme; elle doit ... garder confiance dans la force matérielle et morale qu'elle représente, avec ses amis et ses alliés, et qui lui permettra d'affronter toutes les éventualités.⁷⁸⁷

By the time Daladier returned to power in April 1938, the preparation for war against Germany permeated all aspects of French and Mosellan society and became inextricably connected to the Popular Front's economic, financial and social policies. What had happened during those five years?

It is fair to say that the general attitude in France towards Germany, whether before or immediately after 1933, remained unchanged. In the French collective consciousness, Germany, and before it Prussia, was France's natural and hereditary enemy. During the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, French Premier Clémenceau, whom the British economist John Maynard Keynes described as a 'French Bismarck', had insisted that German military capabilities be limited in order to curb Prussian militarism and assure France's security. In order to further protect France from any future German aggression, he also favoured the creation of one or several independent states on the left bank of the Rhine to act as a buffer zone.⁷⁸⁸ As a compromise between the French demands and the

⁷⁸⁷ De M. François-Poncet, ambassadeur de France à Berlin, à M. Paul-Boncour, ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Berlin, 1^{er} février 1933 in Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Commission de Publication des Documents Relatifs aux Origines de la Guerre 1939-1945, *Documents Diplomatiques Français 1932-1939*, 1^{ère} série, Tome II, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale: 1966, document 253, p.553.

⁷⁸⁸ Clémenceau's other major theme of campaign during the Peace Conference were the German war reparations.

American and British plans, the Versailles Treaty enjoined Germany to reduce its armies to 100,000 men (Part V, Section I, Article 160) but allowed a demilitarised Rhineland to remain under German domination. The articles relating to the new status of the Rhineland (Part III, Section III, Articles 42 and 43) stipulated that Germany was forbidden to maintain or construct fortifications or maintain and assemble armed forces on the left bank of the Rhine. Article 44 stated that 'In case Germany violates in any manner ... Articles 42 and 43, she shall be regarded as committing a hostile act against the Powers signatory of the present Treaty and as calculated to disturb the peace of the world.'⁷⁸⁹ Later, as a co-signatory of the 1925 Locarno Treaties, Germany officially recognised its western frontiers with Belgium and France and agreed to maintain the Rhineland demilitarised.⁷⁹⁰

Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, Germany largely adhered to Versailles, albeit regularly asking for its revision. In the first years of Hitler's chancellorship, the Nazi regime sought the revisions of the peace treaties peacefully just as the Weimar Republic had done previously; hence Germany was not immediately perceived as a threat to French security. What is more, Robert J. Young writes, 'in the early years of power the Nazis were no more capable of waging full-scale war than the last Weimar government which they had succeeded'.⁷⁹¹ Christian Leitz corroborates Young's view as he states, 'In 1933 ... Germany was not even in a position to win a war against its despised eastern neighbour, Poland, let alone against its arch-enemy, France.'⁷⁹² The latter was hopeful that the restrictions imposed on the German army as well as the collective security system on which it relied for much of the 1920s and 1930s would suffice to control Germany.

⁷⁸⁹ *The Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany and other Treaty Engagements, signed at Versailles, June 28th, 1919*, London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1920, p.25.

⁷⁹⁰ Locarno also saw France sign mutual assistance agreements with Poland and Czechoslovakia in the event of a German aggression. For further reading on the Locarno Treaties and their significance in inter-war diplomacy and foreign policy, see Gaynor Johnson (ed.), *Locarno revisited: European Diplomacy, 1920-1929*, London: Frank Cass, 2004.

⁷⁹¹ Robert J. Young, *In Command of France: French foreign policy and military planning, 1933-1940*, Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1978, p.33.

⁷⁹² Christian Leitz, 'Nazi Germany' in Robert Boyce and Joseph A. Maiolo (eds.), *The Origins of World War Two, The Debate Continues*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003, p.11.

But as the Nazi regime began to transform Germany's economy and society in order to prepare for territorial expansion and war, Hitler's military and foreign policy became steadily bolder.⁷⁹³ Using the French parliament's ratification vote of the Franco-Soviet pact as a pretext, German troops entered the Rhineland on 7 March 1936. By posting troops in the demilitarised zone Germany violated not only the Locarno treaty but also affirmed its intention to annul Versailles and regain some of its pre-1918 military and territorial status.⁷⁹⁴ As Peter Jackson writes, it also signalled 'the end of the clandestine phase of German rearmament.'⁷⁹⁵ The French ambassador to Berlin recommended that France should strongly resist '*le fait accompli délibérément créé par le gouvernement allemand*' and that Hitler '*devrait être signifié dans les plus brefs délais ... que la dignité de la France lui interdit d'engager avec lui une négociation sous les pressions militaires*'.⁷⁹⁶ Albert Sarraut, the French Premier who initially proclaimed in a radio broadcast speech, '*Nous ne laisserons pas Strasbourg sous le feu des canons ennemis*', decided to respond to Hitler's military feat merely with a letter of protest and by referring the matter to the League of Nations. France was to react with equal feebleness when Germany annexed Austria two years later.

France's decision not to act militarily against Germany does not signify that it appreciated neither the political consequences of the situation nor the implications to its own security. Nor does it imply, as some historians have argued, that France did not possess adequate leadership or was fundamentally incapable of conducting foreign policy in a determined manner.⁷⁹⁷ Since it is not the purpose

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.11-31.

⁷⁹⁴ For a succinct yet informative summary of French interwar foreign policy, see Peter Jackson, 'France' in Boyce and Maiolo (eds.), *op.cit.*, pp.86-110. Regarding Locarno's influence on French foreign policy, Jackson states, 'The model for France's international policy for most of the inter-war years was the Locarno agreement'. p.93.

⁷⁹⁵ Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi menace: intelligence and policy making, 1933-1939*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.163.

⁷⁹⁶ M. François-Poncet à M. Flandin, ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Berlin, le 7 mars 1936, in Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Commission de Publication..., 2^e série, Tome I, document 299, p.412.

⁷⁹⁷ For example, the French historian Jean-Baptiste Duroselle writes that '*la désagrégation de l'exécutif [l']instabilité française [furent] grave[s] en période de difficultés externes. D'une part elle ne favorisait pas le « sérieux » des dirigeants, d'autre part, elle empêchait tout grand*

of this study to discuss historiographical interpretations of French foreign affairs in the interwar period, suffice it to say that after the Rhineland coup, France embarked on a resolute course of remilitarisation beginning with Blum's nationalisation of the armament industry in August 1936. As Martin Alexander notes, 'the Popular Front set the foundations to do more for guns than for butter.'⁷⁹⁸ Although in all probability the Popular Front did more for butter than guns, Alexander's claim is broadly sound. The Popular Front did indeed initiate France's military rearmament after years of financial cutbacks. Similarly, the Popular Front's foreign policy resolutely focused on Germany.⁷⁹⁹

Following his feat in Austria, which occurred just as France was embroiled in a serious political and financial crisis in March 1938, Hitler began to encourage the German minority in the Czechoslovakia's Sudeten region to make separatist demands.⁸⁰⁰ After months of concerted diplomatic efforts between the Soviet Union, France, Britain, Italy, Germany and other east European countries, the Sudeten crisis as it became known was resolved in Munich on 30 September 1938.⁸⁰¹ There, France, Italy, Britain and Germany signed an agreement that allowed Hitler to take possession of the Sudetenland region and signified the dismemberment of one of France's key allies. The Munich agreement was to have a divisive effect on French and Mosellan politics.

At the national level, divisions over the Munich agreement cut across parties and split the French political class between pro- and anti-Munich supporters (*munichois* and *antimunichois*). The first, who considered themselves

dessein.' Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *La Décadence, 1932-1939*, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1985, pp.15-16.

⁷⁹⁸ Martin S. Alexander, *The Republic in Danger: General Maurice Gamelin and the politics of French defence, 1933-1940*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.111.

⁷⁹⁹ On France's rearmament policy during the period of the Popular Front, Philippe Garraud, 'La Politique de Réarmement de 1936 à 1940: priorités et contraintes', *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains*, 55, 219, 2005, pp.87-102; Robert Frankenstein, *Le Prix du Réarmement Français 1935-1939*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982.

⁸⁰⁰ At the domestic level, the French Senate's refusal to grant Blum the full financial powers he had requested to implement his new financial policy led to his resignation as Premier on 7 April 1938.

⁸⁰¹ For further reading on the development of the Czechoslovak crisis, see Maya Latynski (ed.), *Reappraising the Munich Pact, Continental Perspectives*, Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press; Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992 and Igor Lukes and Erik Goldtsein (eds.), *The Munich Crisis, 1938: prelude to World War Two*, London, Portland: Frank Cass, 1999.

pacifists, were generally but not exclusively found on the right. By combining a genuine fear of war and a visceral loathing of Communism and the Soviet Union, which they blamed for trying to instigate a war between France and Germany, the right-wing *munichois* included the Parti Populaire Français, the Fédération Républicaine and the Alliance Démocratique. A few notable exceptions included Georges Mandel, Paul Reynaud and François de Wendel. De Wendel criticised the right-wing appeasers for their inability to differentiate between the internal and external threats facing France and for their obsession with Communism. As he wrote in his diary the day before the Munich agreement was signed,

*Il y a actuellement un danger bolchevique intérieur et un danger allemand extérieur. Pour moi, le second est plus grand que le premier et je désapprouve nettement ceux qui règlent leur attitude sur la conception inverse. Il ne tient qu'à la France elle-même d'échapper au bolchévisme. Le danger allemand est là, à côté de nous, et nous n'y pouvons rien...*⁸⁰²

The Parti Social Français' official position was as was often the case ambiguous. At the party's national congress in December 1938, Ybarnégaray summarised the official position on Munich: '*Pour les accords de Munich parce que dans la situation où se trouvait la France, il était impossible de faire autrement. Contre ... parce qu'ils constituent une profonde défaite diplomatique.*'⁸⁰³ Within the Popular Front, the majority of the CGT, the SFIO and the Radical-Socialist party supported appeasement.

The *anti-munichois*, who supported military action against Germany and whom the pro-Munich supporters considered bellicose, included the PCF, members of the SFIO and the CGT, some Radicals such as Jean Zay and Pierre Cot and parts of the Parti Démocrate Populaire behind Champetier de Ribes. Thus, having to choose between peace and war on the one side, and fascism and anti-Communism on the other, French politicians faced a choice that led to divisions across the traditional left-right divide. It is interesting to note that while

⁸⁰² Jean-Noël Jeanneney, *François de Wendel en République: l'argent et le pouvoir, 1914-1940*, Paris: Seuil, 1976, p.583.

⁸⁰³ CHSPo, de la Rocque papers, 'Le 3^e Congrès du Parti Social Français', *L'Espoir Français*, 9 décembre 1938, No 253, p.11, LR65.

the methods and ideology of the two opposing camps differed, with some favouring appeasement and others persuasive military action, they shared a common objective: the long-term preservation of peace by keeping Germany under control.

There is a consensus among historians that Munich sounded the death-knell for the Popular Front. As the three coalition parties disagreed over Munich, differences of opinion eroded the already fragile unity of the Popular Front as well as the internal unity of the constituent parties. Additionally, by unanimously voting against Munich in parliament, the PCF excluded itself from the coalition and gave Daladier the impetus to renounce the Popular Front at the October 1938 Radical party congress in Marseille. Thus, when the CGT called for a general strike on 30 November, with the aim of opposing Reynaud's recent decrees as well as the government's appeasement policy towards Germany, Daladier was prepared to force the labour movement to evacuate the occupied factories. Ironically, while the idea of a united left was born in the wake of a general strike in February 1934, it ended in the wake of another, albeit unsuccessful general strike four years later. Moreover, while the Popular Front was borne of a domestic antifascist imperative, it ended largely because of its inability to remain united in the face of the foreign fascist threat; firstly with the divisions over Spain and lastly with Germany. Thus, Moscow's strategy of the popular front, which aimed to contain the European fascist threat, collapsed when the PCF entered opposition and the French left became disunited again.

Due to its common borders with Germany, the Moselle witnessed the rise of the German threat at first hand. A few weeks before the Saarland plebiscite of 13 January 1935, the *sous-préfet* in Sarreguemines, wrote that,

*Les événements qui préoccupent actuellement le plus l'opinion publique sont évidemment les événements sarrois. Quelques inquiétude (sic) s'étaient manifesté (sic) en Novembre à ce sujet et nombreux étaient ceux qui craignaient un coup de force des hitlériens.*⁸⁰⁴

⁸⁰⁴ ADM, Rapport mensuel du sous-préfet au préfet, 22 décembre 1934, 26Z2.

After 90 percent of Saarlanders voted for the return of their province to the German fatherland and less than 0.5 percent voted for unification with France, the Moselle gained an additional frontier with Germany.⁸⁰⁵ Hitler's speech after the plebiscite stated that he was fully satisfied at the results and that he only sought a peaceful resolution to the wrongs inflicted on Germany at Versailles.⁸⁰⁶ In secret, however, events, as seen from the Moselle, contradicted Hitler's public expressions of peace and reconciliation.

Indeed, eighteen months after the Saarland's return to German domination, a *commissaire spécial* noted that Germany had already begun militarising the region and Nazifying the local population.⁸⁰⁷ According to his report, the Reich was slowly increasing the number of troops in the Palatinate region by sending soldiers in increments of twenty at a time so as not to attract attention. It also reported the presence of military trenches disguised as shallow ditches along the French borders, the installation of anti-aircraft guns in Saarbrücken and Saarlouis and the construction of a landing field near Saarbrücken. It then described the replacement of SS troops sent on military training by *feldgendarmes* and the regular rounds of watchful SA men near the French frontier village of Blies-Guersviller. The *commissaire spécial* concluded his report by mentioning the much-publicised visit of Werner Von Blomberg, the Reich's minister of War and Field Marshall, to the Saarland and the Palatinate. With regards to the Nazification of society, he described how the Nazi party organised regular propaganda parades in the region. He estimated a 40,000-strong turnout during a recent Nazi-sponsored singing festival in Saarbrücken.

As the German threat became more and more perceptible in the Moselle, the local population became increasingly anxious. The *préfet* reported, '*Les raisons d'intérêt et d'inquiétude sont plutôt venues de la situation internationale et*

⁸⁰⁵ 'The German Triumph in the Saar', *The Times*, 16 January 1935, p.10. According to the newspaper's figures, almost 9 percent of Saarlanders voted for the status quo to remain under the League of Nations' authority.

⁸⁰⁶ AN, 'Le discours d'Adolf Hitler après le plébiscite de la Sarre', F7/13983.

⁸⁰⁷ ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au sous-préfet, 20 juillet 1936, 26Z3.

*plus spécialement de la ... politique extérieure allemande.*⁸⁰⁸ Despite what the *préfet* called ‘*la naturelle et profonde méfiance à l’égard de l’Allemagne ... dans cette région frontrière*’, it appeared that Mosellans approved France’s appeasement policy towards Germany.⁸⁰⁹ As he wrote, ‘*l’idée d’une détente dans les relations franco-allemandes commence à trouver audience et apparaît comme le seul moyen possible d’écartier la menace de conflit.*’⁸¹⁰ One of the chief reasons behind the Moselle’s desire for appeasement seemed to have stemmed from its political inclination. Indeed, as anti-Communism pervaded conservative society and political parties, it appears that Mosellans, like right-wing Munich supporters at the national level, worried more of a French alliance with the Soviet Union than a conciliatory approach towards Germany. The *préfet*’s interpretation supports this theory, as he wrote, ‘*L’hostilité des partis de droite à l’égard d’une politique d’alliance avec la Russie soviétique ... semble avoir beaucoup contribué à ... réviser [la] position traditionnelle en face du problème allemand.*’⁸¹¹

This is particularly revealing of the region’s political shift in the mid-1930s when the Soviet Union and Communism replaced Germany as the prime threat to Mosellan security. As mentioned earlier in this study, by exacerbating the ideological rift between left and right and bringing national politics to the Moselle, the Popular Front forced the population to identify within a wider national political context. The fact that Mosellans now favoured a rapprochement with Germany reflects the deep-seated fear and loathing of Communism in the region. It also demonstrated that Mosellans were willing to risk domination by Germany in order to avoid the suspected Communist revolution and a European war which, as many right wingers thought, was promoted by Moscow. It also reveals, to some extent, the influence of pacifism on the French and Mosellan conservatives.

Once a tenet of left-wing ideology as well as French foreign policy in the second half of the 1920s, pacifism was widely adopted by conservatives in the

⁸⁰⁸ ADBR, Rapport mensuel du préfet au ministre de l’Intérieur, Metz, 24 février 1938, 98AL634.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*

1930s.⁸¹² For example, Pierre Laval's foreign policy as the minister of Foreign Affairs in 1934-1935 was largely driven by his loathing and fear of war.⁸¹³ The same may be said of some Mosellan political leaders such as Schuman. As Roth writes in his recent biography of Schuman, '*Ce qui motivait Schuman [dans les affaires internationales] c'était la conservation de la paix.*'⁸¹⁴ As the Czechoslovak crisis progressed and war appeared all but inevitable, the Mosellan Catholic right generally advocated peace and conciliation with Germany. A few days after Daladier called for the army's partial mobilisation, Schuman led the delegation of Mosellan and Alsatian parliamentarians to a meeting with Daladier. The Mosellan deputy warned Daladier that should the latter decide to call for general mobilisation and declare war on Germany, the group of parliamentarians he represented would refuse to vote for war credits at the National Assembly.⁸¹⁵ A few days before, Schuman had written an article in *Die Lothringer Volkszeitung* against launching a war for the benefit of Czechoslovakia. Supported by legalistic arguments, Schuman, a qualified lawyer, wrote that should France decide not to rush to Czechoslovakia's help and let Hitler acquire the Sudeten region, the country would not breach any contract.⁸¹⁶

In December, after Munich had been signed and ratified by the French parliament, the Moselle's right-wing deputies unanimously voted in favour of the motion of confidence in the Daladier government.⁸¹⁷ Thus, they demonstrated their public approval of Daladier's foreign as well as domestic policies. Because Béron did not participate in the vote, it is difficult to tell how the sole Mosellan representative of the Popular Front interpreted Munich. A few days before Hitler invaded what remained of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, the local right's position

⁸¹² The main architect of French foreign policy in the 1920s was Aristide Briand, the French minister of Foreign Affairs. He believed in the principle of collective security and negotiated inter alia the Locarno Treaties in 1925. He co-won the 1926 Nobel Peace Prize with German chancellor Gustav Stresemann for their achievements at Locarno.

⁸¹³ See Robert J. Young, *op.cit.*, pp.76-98.

⁸¹⁴ Roth, *Robert Schuman*, p.189.

⁸¹⁵ CHSPo, Genebrier papers, 'Les Alsaciens- Lorrains et le problème des Sudètes, (extrait de « La Vie Politique et Sociale en Alsace 1938-1939»)', GE12.

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁷ The National Assembly vote counted 315 votes in support of the government and 241 against, including the Socialists and the Communists.

towards Germany was unchanged. At a public meeting in Sierck-lès-Bains, a village in his constituency and close to the German and Luxembourgier frontiers, Schuman declared, in the *préfet's* words, '*combien il fut humain et même prudent de ne pas être intervenu par les armes dans le conflit tchécoslovaque.*'⁸¹⁸ He told his audience that France was now much better prepared militarily and politically should a conflict with Germany arise. In order to reassure the population, he cited as examples the alliance with Britain and the restoration of social order in France. With regards to the position of the Moselle in France's military strategy, he mentioned some of the measures that would be taken in the case of war. For example, the population living in the red zone – the area between the Maginot Line fortifications and the German and Luxembourgier borders - would be evacuated and given gas masks, mayors and their secretaries would remain to assist military authorities and all motorised vehicles would be requisitioned and distributed to the evacuation commissions. Schuman nonetheless concluded by repeating that there was no danger of a war against Germany.⁸¹⁹

Schuman may have spoken for most Mosellan parliamentarians. Unfortunately, due to a severe lack of sources, too little is known of their attitudes. What remains unclear is why Mosellan Catholics supported appeasement with a regime which had forced German Catholics into a restrictive Concordat and which terrorised and sent thousands to concentration camps. According to Bonafoux-Verrax, the Fédération Nationale Catholique was aware of the treatment of Catholics in Germany. She quotes an article in *La France Catholique* in May 1938; '*Les camps de concentration sont peuplés d'innombrables jeunesses catholiques ... les sévices que les jeunes gens y subissent provoquent notre dégoût.*'⁸²⁰ Unlike Jean-Claude Delbreil who argues that the Fédération Nationale Catholique was *pro-* and later *anti-munichoise*, Bonafoux-Verrax argues that the Catholic association's position on Munich resembled that of the Parti Social Français: General de Castelnau, the leader of the Fédération Nationale Catholique, was

⁸¹⁸ ADBR, Rapport du préfet au vice-président du Conseil, Metz, 16 mars 1939, 98AL634.

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁰ Bonafoux-Verrax, *op.cit.*, p.395.

neither for or against Munich but urged for a rapid remilitarisation as the issue was not if France would go to war against Germany but rather when. Unfortunately, there are no sources on the positions of the Action Catholique Lorraine or the other local right-wing political parties.

In all likelihood, local right wingers would have followed the orders of their respective parties. In the name of the Parti Social Français, Emile Peter, the deputy for Sarrebourg, was neither *pro-* or *anti-munichois* but advocated the creation of a central body to oversee the much-needed rise in the production of armament.⁸²¹ Judging by Andres' infallible loyalty to de la Rocque, it is highly probable that the Mosellan leader of the Parti Social Français followed the party's official same line, which was neither for nor against Munich. The same could be said of the Parti Populaire Français though too little is known of its local leadership and the direction of the sections. On the left, local Socialists' reaction and the ensuing divisions that split the national party between and *pro-* and *anti-Munichois* remains unknown. So far as the PCF was concerned, local Communists applied the party's line and rejected Munich. Thus, as at the national level, Germany and Munich divided politicians in forcing them to choose between peace and war.

Xenophobia and antisemitism

One of the paradoxical effects that occurred within the context of the Popular Front and the ascension of Nazi Germany was the rise of antisemitism in Mosellan politics. Indeed, while the Popular Front was created to fight the far right, some of the latter's world views, such as antisemitism, appeared to have permeated mainstream politics and society during the coalition's four years.

Antisemitism in Mosellan politics did not emerge as a direct result of the left-wing coalition victory in 1936, since it already existed with the openly antisemitic Action Française and the Francistes. In September 1936, a group of

⁸²¹ CHSPo, de la Rocque papers, 'Le 3^e Congrès du Parti Social Français', *L'Espoir Français*, 9 décembre 1938, No 253, p.12, LR65.

unidentified people covered the homes of Jews with racist tracts in Sarreguemines.⁸²² In March 1937, some members of the Mosellan Catholic clergy demonstrated their antisemitism by supporting the clearly antisemitic speech of the editor of the Colmar-based *Elsasser Kurier*. Indeed, during a meeting of the Action Catholique Lorraine in Sarreguemines, the editor of the newspaper condemned the presence of Jews in the government. According to a *commissaire spécial*, he proclaimed that the population of Alsace and Lorraine would never accept that '*cette race qui ne représente même pas 2% de la population de la France ... nous impose sa loi*.'⁸²³ The 450-strong audience who attended the meeting and who comprised largely local clergymen, including Sarreguemines' archpriest evidently welcomed the racist remarks since they gave the speaker a long applause.

By the end of 1938, antisemites attacked Jews on racial and cultural grounds and increasingly for economic reasons. As Jewish refugees, mainly from the Saarland, began to settle in the *département*, anti-Jewish diatribes based on economic and racial grounds became commonplace among certain social and political classes. On the right, a group of artisans and small shop owners created the Front Anti-juif de la Moselle in November 1938. Based in the centre of Metz, the committee of the Front Anti-juif included a greengrocer as president, Rodolphe Leuner, and a goods salesman as vice-president, Eugène Hoffmann.⁸²⁴ The organisation's aim, as quoted by Philippe Wilmouth, was to '*sauvegarder les intérêts des commerçants et artisans français contre l'invasion des Juifs immigrés ... qui causent un préjudice sensible aux commerçants et artisans de notre département*'.⁸²⁵

Whereas the majority of the French political right almost certainly held racial and cultural prejudices against Jews whom they associated with Communism, Blum and a worldwide complot, the Mosellan Front Anti-juif viewed them

⁸²² ADM, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au sous-préfet, 10 septembre 1936, 26Z16.

⁸²³ ADBR, Rapport du commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines au sous-préfet, 1^{er} mars 1937, 98AL675.

⁸²⁴ Wilmouth, *op.cit.* p.130.

⁸²⁵ *Ibid.*

differently. It mainly described Jews as foreigners who had come to the Moselle to steal work from Christian Frenchmen. In fact, the Front Anti-juif accepted any Socialist, Communist, Autonomist or right winger as long as they were prepared to eradicate the *département* of Jews. With an approximately 1,700-strong membership in Metz alone, the movement also counted supporters in Thionville, Boulay, Sarreguemines and Hagondange.⁸²⁶ It published a bi-monthly newspaper, *La Rafale Anti-Juive*, which, according to Wilmouth, took its inspiration from national antisemitic newspapers such as *Gringoire* and *L'Action Française*. Unfortunately for this study, sources pertaining to the Front Anti-juif are sparse. Therefore it has not been possible to learn of its relation or influence on the local political right and population.

However antisemitism based on economic grounds did not emanate solely from disaffected middle-class shop owners or artisans, but also involved some on the left. The *préfet*, however, expressed surprise to learn of antisemitism among local Communists. As he wrote in a report,

*un phénomène curieux vient de se produire particulièrement au sein de la section de Metz ... : l'animosité qui entoure quelques uns des dirigeants de confession israélite, paraît s'inspirer d'une sorte d'antisémitisme...*⁸²⁷

In a subsequent report, he wrote that the internal crisis befalling the *départementale* federation of the PCF was due to a lack of leadership and funds as well as the recent upsurge of xenophobia and antisemitism among the rank and file. As he wrote,

*le parti communiste traversait une crise très pénible. Crises de cadres et d'effectif... [ainsi que] de très sérieuses difficultés financières. Ce marasme ... s'accompagne ... aussi à une tendance qu'il est curieux, à mon sens, d'enregistrer dans de tels milieux et qui est faite à la fois de xénophobie et d'antisémitisme.*⁸²⁸

The local SFIO appeared just as affected, as some of its rank and file harboured similar feelings towards one of their Jewish leaders. As the *préfet* noted,

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁷ ADBR, Rapport mensuel du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 2 mai 1938, 98AL634.

⁸²⁸ ADBR, Rapport mensuel du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 5 juillet 1938, 98AL634.

*l'erreur commise récemment par la Fédération départementale du Parti socialiste S.F.I.O. en déléguant [au Congrès national du parti] à Royan un naturalisé de fraîche date, M. Konopnicki, a soulevé l'amertume de tous les militants et sympathisants, qui ont déploré ... que l'intéressé ... ait pu prendre place dans un congrès national, au nom des populations françaises de la Lorraine.*⁸²⁹

It is not clear to what extent the Socialist and Communist rank and file's antisemitic feelings influenced the party's direction or even if they led to divisions within the local federations. It is true that on the face of it, left-wing antisemitism might appear inconsistent with the Socialist and Communist doctrines – even if in nineteenth-century France some theorists of Socialism such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Auguste Blanqui identified Jewish capitalists and usurers as enemies of the working masses. But the form of antisemitism witnessed among left-wingers in interwar France had nothing to do with doctrine and everything to do with the escalation of xenophobia and racism that occurred in French society and politics in the late 1930s. This arose in part from the recent influx of refugees, mainly Spanish, Italian, German and East-European, who arrived in France during the period of the Popular Front.⁸³⁰

With regards to the PCF, Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton state that the leadership of the PCF 'considered antisemitism a bourgeois diversion tactic' and 'although many militants were unhappy about immigrants ... the party's hands, officially, were clean.'⁸³¹ Vicky Caron agrees with this theory and adds an economic dimension to the PCF's antisemitism as she writes that 'much of the rank and file was openly anti-semitic, fearing economic competition from Jewish immigrant workers.'⁸³² While the Socialist leadership rejected antisemitism and condemned the Nazis' attacks on the Reich's Jews on *Kristallnacht*, some within

⁸²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁰ There were 2.2 million foreigners in France in 1936 (just over 5 percent of the population). Although many left France after 1931 (2.7 million; 6.5 percent), roughly half a million were naturalised between 1931 and 1936. Statistique Générale de la France, *Résultats Statistiques du Recensement Général de la Population effectué le 8 mars 1936*, Tome I, 2^e partie, p.58.

⁸³¹ Michael M. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, New York: Basic Books, 1981, p.47.

⁸³² Vicky Caron, 'Prelude to Vichy: France and the Jewish Refugees in the Era of Appeasement', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20, 1, January 1985, p.167.

the party publicised their dislike of Blum and Jews in general.⁸³³ Ralph Schor quotes the example of Armand Chouffet, Socialist deputy for the Rhone, who exclaimed, '*J'en ai assez de la dictature juive sur le parti. Le socialisme n'est pas un ghetto. Je ne marche pas, moi, pour la guerre juive.*'⁸³⁴

Marrus and Paxton are correct when they state that 'French antisemitism was no mere import, a hothouse plant artificially nurtured by German secret funds.'⁸³⁵ The authors argue that 1930s xenophobia and antisemitism in France were linked to the recent influx of foreigners, including Jews, and the threat the latter represented culturally, economically and politically to French natives. They also claim that xenophobia and the situation for Jews worsened in 1938 when France operated a crackdown on foreigners.⁸³⁶ This was undeniably true for France in general. But due to the Moselle's shared border with Germany, could the escalation of antisemitism in the *département* be the result of Nazi influence?

Goodfellow argues that a number of Alsatian political organisations such as the Bauernbund, the Parti Social Français and the Catholic Union Populaire Républicaine (the political heir of the *Elsass-Lothringisches Zentrum* and counterpart of the Moselle's Union Républicaine Lorraine) were influenced by Nazi antisemitism.⁸³⁷ While the Moselle's political character differed from that of Alsace at many levels – the most noticeable examples being the popularity of pro-German autonomist ideas in Alsace and their near absence in the Moselle – it is tempting to posit that the Nazi antisemitic propaganda extended to the *département* and contributed to the development of xenophobia.

While the *préfet* underscored the general emergence of antisemitism in his *département* and its association with foreign propagandists posing as refugees,

⁸³³ *Ibid.*, p.165. During the night of 10 and 11 November 1938, the Nazis organised nationwide attacks against Jewish businesses, homes and synagogues in Germany. This led to the death of 91 and the imprisonment of 30,000 Jews in concentration camps. In Marrus and Paxton, *op.cit.*, p.26.

⁸³⁴ Ralph Schor, *L'Antisémitisme en France pendant les années trente: prélude à Vichy*, Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1992. p.48.

⁸³⁵ Marrus and Paxton, *op.cit.*, p.45.

⁸³⁶ The Daladier government published a decree that authorised the internment of foreigners that threatened public order and national security. It also allowed for the denaturalisation of freshly-acquired citizenships if their holders were found to be unworthy to be French.

⁸³⁷ Goodfellow, 'From Communism to Nazism', p.146.

the causal relations between Nazism and xenophobia in the Moselle are not clear. The *préfet* wrote that the antisemitic contagion affecting the Mosellan sections of the PCF '*souligne toute la virulence d'une tendance devenue générale en ces régions.*'⁸³⁸ He also added that the contagion '*semble atteindre les classes les plus diverses de la société et ne laisse pas d'inquiéter les chefs des Consistoires [israélites]*'.⁸³⁹ While it was clear to him that the recent arrival of foreign refugees wrongfully claiming refugee status was responsible for the propagation of antisemitic ideas in the Moselle, he did not specifically blame German influence in his report. As for Marrus and Paxton, they point out the secret activities of German secret agents in neighbouring Alsace, but do not state whether these activities extended to the Moselle. Thus, the Moselle's relationship with Nazi agents and the extent to which the *département's* social and political arena were influenced by German propaganda remains unclear.

Conclusion

During the Radical-Socialist annual congress in Marseille in late October 1938, party delegates agreed that the Communists' attacks against Daladier effectively signalled the end of the Popular Front. Blaming the coalition's breakdown on the Communists, a motion voted at the congress stated,

*le parti communiste, par l'agitation qu'il entretient à travers le Pays, par les difficultés qu'il a créées aux gouvernements qui se sont succédés depuis 1936, par son opposition agressive et injurieuse de ces derniers mois a rompu la solidarité qu'il l'unissait aux autres partis du Rassemblement Populaire.*⁸⁴⁰

A few days later, the Radical-Socialists and the Socialists left the national committee of the *Rassemblement Populaire*, thus leaving the Communists at the head of a phantom coalition. Why did the PCF remain committed to the Popular Front after being abandoned by its old allies? According to Courtois and Lazar, the

⁸³⁸ ADBR, Rapport mensuel du préfet au ministre de l'Intérieur, Metz, 2 mai 1938, 98AL634.

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴⁰ CHSPo, Genebrier papers, 'Le Front Populaire', nd, signé Genebrier, GE5.

French Communist leadership genuinely believed that the antifascist axis supported by the Soviet Union would thrive again in France. They write of Thorez's euphoria and optimism before the Central Committee in May 1939:

*gommant les déchirures apparues en octobre et novembre 1938, il en appelle à nouveau à la ronde de la paix capable d'empêcher les agresseurs fascistes d'atteindre leurs buts et à la constitution d'un gouvernement de défense nationale et de salut public...*⁸⁴¹

Without a doubt, domestic events such as the Clichy riots and the Communists' refusal to accept Daladier's repudiation of the 40-hour week legislation deepened divisions that gradually eroded the unity of the Popular Front. As Daladier managed to restore the old social order by defeating the labour movement led by the CGT, French right wingers largely supported his policies. Paradoxically, Daladier, who would receive full legislative powers with the support of the right in March 1939, was the same man whom the right had forced to resign in February 1934. But the right's inability to unite throughout the period of the Popular Front and particularly under the banner of the Front de la Liberté reveals deep personal and party divisions as well as a clear lack of direction.

In the Moselle, the right organised the opposition to Blum's school reform for political ends. It is clear that compared to the unplanned demonstrations of 1924, there was very little popular reaction against Blum's reforms in 1936-1937. This indicates a disjunction between right-wing politicians and the conservative masses. But it also demonstrates the local politicians' unwillingness to accept some of the Republic's secular laws and their belief in particularist politics. Mirroring the national right's inability to form alliances, local conservatives had difficulty uniting. Despite the union of the right in an anti-Marxist front at the 1937 local elections, Mosellan right wingers never succeeded in creating what the left had achieved with the Popular Front. Political rivalry between the Front Lorrain and the Parti Social Français was by far the main source of contention.

But it was foreign policy, and the German issue in particular, that undermined the Popular Front and brought the return of the right. By the time the

⁸⁴¹ Courtois et Lazar, *op.cit.*, p.165.

government began to prepare France for a conflict against Germany, Daladier felt he had to control the labour movement, achieve social peace and attract capital back into the country. Only if France was at peace with itself, could it then be united in the joint effort of remilitarisation and war. As he declared in a speech: '*La Paix à l'intérieur condition de la Paix au dehors, voilà ce que nous voulons.*'⁸⁴² The fact that this sentence echoed Metz's official motto to this day: '*Si nous avons Paix dedans, nous avons Paix dehors*', reflected the conservative character of the region. In the Moselle, Schuman and the other right-wing parliamentarians largely supported Daladier's foreign policy and the Munich agreement. Although Schuman rejected war largely on pacifist grounds, it is possible that the ideological reasoning that led many French right wingers to believe that Moscow was attempting to foment a war between France and Germany might also have influenced him. Similarly, within the context of the end of the Popular Front, Mosellans appear to have contributed to the general attitude of xenophobia and antisemitism that prevailed in France in the late 1930s. This led some of the Communist and Socialist rank and file to reject their Jewish party leaders. Interestingly, while the Popular Front was born of an antifascist imperative, it also contributed to the resurgence of racism and xenophobia, thus deepening the divisions that already existed in French society and politics, and not least in the Moselle.

⁸⁴² CHSPo, Genebrier papers, 'Décrets-lois du 2 mai 1938, Déclaration sur la Stabilisation', 4 mai 1938, GE7.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the dual political, linguistic and cultural heritage and well-organised political clergy in the border region of the Moselle, and the successes and failures of the right in the highly charged atmosphere of the Popular Front. By focusing upon the relationship between the Catholic Union Républicaine Lorraine and its associates (Front Lorrain and Action Catholique Lorraine) and other right-wing political groups, mainly the Parti Social Français, the thesis has underscored the effect of the national political and social crisis upon local left-wing as well as right-wing political parties. It has examined the achievements and difficulties of the French and Mosellan right and demonstrated how local conservatives reacted to (a) the social and political change introduced by the Popular Front and (b) the implementation of right-wing national political parties in the region. In doing so, the thesis has described how the local right responded to the challenge by organising an anti-Communist bloc which however failed to unite the region's conservative forces in an effective alliance. Despite sharing common moral and social values, not least anti-Communism and the preservation of social order, it failed to do so for political and personal reasons, much like its counterpart at the national level.

On the left, the working class masses united in the Popular Front and challenged the established social order. They developed a new political and social identity, which, in the Moselle, led to the workers' participation in the strike movement of 1936 and the rapid rise of the CGT. The fact that a new generation of Mosellans born after 1918 came of age in a period of heightened tensions between left and right also contributed to the integration of workers into national left-wing politics. But, with the rise of the German threat and Daladier's new economic and social policies as well as his determination to break the labour movement, many Mosellans retreated from organised political and social movements or turned to less radical parties such as the SFIO and the Union Républicaine Lorraine. Thus, the thesis concludes that while, by the end of 1938, a large proportion of Mosellans remained largely conservative, a smaller section

located in the region's industrial centres participated, albeit briefly, in the national movement of left-wing activism which developed in the period of the Popular Front.

A Border Region

The first conclusion of this thesis is that the region's position at the border of two historic European powers largely influenced its inclination towards particularist and conservative politics. Situated between two great nations, both of which claimed ownership of the territory, the disputed region underwent a repetitive cycle of military conquest and occupation and changed sovereignty three times between 1870 and 1918. When the Germans acquired the eastern part of Lorraine and attached it to the region of Alsace to form the *Reichsland* in 1871, they fabricated Alsace-Lorraine, a province devoid of political, social, linguistic or cultural homogeneity. Unlike other German lands which enjoyed some form of legislative and executive autonomy, the *Reichsland* was treated differently and remained under the direct authority of the Kaiser. Because it rejected Germany's cultural and political domination as well as that of Alsace, with which it had no historic and cultural bonds, Lothringen therefore looked inwards and constructed a regional and political identity distinct from that of Germany, France and Alsace. Though it accepted subordination to the national state, it favoured a particularist approach which mobilised the population into political action in defence of their distinct linguistic, religious and cultural traditions.

The main architect and beneficiary of this particular identity was the Catholic right, which mobilised the population's discontent against the German state before 1918 and the French thereafter. By the interwar period, the Catholic right was represented by the Union Républicaine Lorraine and the Christlich-Soziale Partei. As it had done during the period of the *Reichsland*, the leadership of both parties did not hesitate to question and challenge the central state whenever it threatened the region's local laws and culture; hence their success among the Mosellan voters who watched anxiously as they changed sovereignty once more. As historiography on disputed territories has demonstrated, particularist politics are by no means unusual in borderlands and irredentist lands. In a recent study of ethnic conflict management in borderlands, the political

scientist Stefan Wolff uses the case of the *Reichsland* and Alsace to exemplify his theories. As he states, political particularism, represented in interwar Alsace by the Union Populaire Républicaine, was successful because it expressed 'the distinct Alsatian identity that had developed over the centuries and gave Alsatians a sense of community and feeling of solidarity beyond class and ideological borders.'⁸⁴³ Though the Moselle developed a different political character to that of Alsace, *le particularisme mosellan*, which permeated interwar Mosellan politics, was also the result of a distinctive historical context that cultivated a sense of belonging, solidarity and a common past among the population.

The Right

The second conclusion of the thesis is that, despite their participation in national politics, Mosellan right wingers and the Metz notables in particular were still firmly grounded in their particularist roots. The Union Républicaine Lorraine's parliamentarians belonged to the groups of the Fédération Républicaine, the Parti Démocrate Populaire, the Parti Social Français, the Indépendants Républicains and the Indépendants d'Action Populaire at the National Assembly and the Senate. It is true that the Fédération Républicaine, which was particularly successful in neighbouring Meurthe-et-Moselle where many Mosellans chose to live after 1871, never crossed the borders of the Moselle. But Marin's party financed the electoral campaign of a number of Union Républicaine Lorraine deputies and senators such as Sérot, Moncelle and Hirschauer in exchange for their adhesion to his parliamentary group.⁸⁴⁴

What is more, in spite of its particularist traditions and the fact that its culture was rooted in a different context to that of the French right, the Union Républicaine Lorraine and the associated Front Lorrain behaved like the majority of French conservatives in the interwar period: they were divided and associated

⁸⁴³ Stefan Wolff, *Disputed Territories, The Transnational Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict Settlement*, New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003, pp.54-55.

⁸⁴⁴ AN, Marin papers, 'Subventions remises par la Fédération Républicaine de France pour les élections législatives de 1936', nd, 317AP80. A separate note states that the Fédération Républicaine gave 10,000 francs to Hirschauer and his fellow candidates in the Moselle.

with the anti-parliamentarian right against the Popular Front. They combated the left and campaigned for trade unions opposed to the godless CGT. Like their national peers, local conservatives attempted to form alliances against the Communists. Like them, they failed to do so largely for political reasons.

But despite these similarities, the Mosellan right was fundamentally a regional force. Unlike parties such as the Parti Social Français and the Fédération Républicaine, it did not take its orders from Paris and was run by local notables who, for the most part, had entered politics when the region was under German domination. Thus, while participating in the national movement that challenged the Popular Front, the PCF and the CGT, the Union Républicaine Lorraine and its associates also resisted the nationalisation of local politics. Individuals such as Ritz exemplified this duality. He supported the Meurthe-et-Mosellan anti-Communist Rassemblement National Lorrain but never formally adhered to it. Instead he promoted the Front Lorrain at the *départemental* level. Other right-wing politicians in the *département* displayed a similar attitude. As mentioned in chapter Five, the Metz municipal councillors who resigned from the Parti Social Français did so because they refused the diktat imposed by Paris. Instead, they favoured the local notables' decisions, even if it meant supporting a candidate from the rival Parti Populaire Français.

The Popular Front

The third conclusion of the thesis is that despite the right's counter-offensive and the left's history of failures in the Moselle, the Popular Front gave Mosellan workers the opportunity to participate in a collective movement with national and international ramifications. Because of the turbulent domestic and international context, the period of the Popular Front marked the culmination of the radicalisation of French politics and their polarisation between left and right. In the Moselle this polarisation led the working masses to join the national labour movement in unprecedented numbers, and to look beyond the boundaries of their region and identify themselves with the wider national political scene. The 1919 strikes, which Millerand described as an expression of linguistic favouritism in favour of native German and dialect- speakers, gave a good indication of the

priorities of Mosellan workers in the immediate post-war period. They also revealed the importance of linguistic and cultural factors in the shaping of the workers' identity: on the one side the *Français de l'Intérieur* who did not understand local customs and could only communicate in French, and on the other the indigenous workers who felt threatened by the arrival of French workers. This division between French speakers and German or dialect speakers facilitated to some extent the development of the Autonomist movement and the PCF's separatist agenda in the 1920s.

By contrast, the 1936 strikes showed Mosellan workers under a different light as they mobilised in a national socio-political movement. By and large, those who participated in the movement did not contest the presence of *Français de l'Intérieur* or asked recognition for their particular roots and traditions. In the coal-mining canton of Forbach, local supporters of the Popular Front even demanded that their participation in the national movement be officially acknowledged. As a sign of gratitude for Blum's role in the Matignon agreements, they telegraphed the Premier asking permission to change the name of their town from Stiring-Wendel – a mining town built by the de Wendels - to Stiring-Jaurès.⁸⁴⁵ That a community located at the heart of the German-speaking part of the *département* communicated with one of France's historic Socialist leaders indicates a certain shift in the way some perceived France. Other factors such as the economic crisis and the fact that by 1936-1938 a new generation of Mosellans had come of age under French domination should not be ignored. Though little is known of the combined effect of these two factors on the shaping of local politics, they certainly played an important role in the definition of the workers' new identity.

The challenge for every historian is to offer an impartial yet critical view of their subject. The study of the Popular Front in France is doubly challenging as it remains a highly ideologically- and emotionally-charged symbol of the political and social tensions in the country. Even today, it occupies an important place in the

⁸⁴⁵ ADBR, Télégramme du comité local du Front populaire à Blum, 8 juillet 1936, 98AL1036.

French collective memory and reflects the divisions which to some extent continue to define French politics and society between left and right. The former, the Parti Socialiste (PS) and the PCF in particular, declare they are the Popular Front's direct descendants and claim credit for the 1936 social laws (paid holidays and the 40-hour week). At the 2008 national congress of the French Socialist party in Reims, Ségolène Royal, the Socialist party's candidate in the 2007 presidential elections, declared that the time had come to create a new Popular Front to overcome the left's current difficulties and defeat the right. As she suggested to Bertrand Delanoë, the Socialist mayor of Paris, '*Un nouveau Front populaire, ça ne vous tente pas?*' More recently, Marie-Georges Buffet, the current leader of the PCF, created a new coalition that sought to gather all the forces of the left. The coalition, called the *Front de Gauche*, claims its descentance from the Popular Front.

Generally speaking, the right has still not forgiven the left, combined within the Popular Front, for the humiliation of the strikes and the Matignon agreements. There are some right wingers, however, who do not hesitate to claim they are the heirs of the Popular Front. During his campaign for the 2007 presidential elections, Nicolas Sarkozy, the leader of the right-wing Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) declared, '*La droite d'aujourd'hui [a] ... le droit de revendiquer l'héritage des conquêtes sociales du Front Populaire*'.⁸⁴⁶ Sarkozy's fifteen-point electoral programme was entitled '*Ensemble tout devient possible*', a clear reference to Marceau Pivert's famous article '*Tout est Possible*', published by the Socialist leader at the height of the strike movement in May 1936. Is this a sign that the old ideological confrontations that opposed pro- and anti-Popular Front supporters have lost meaning for right wingers such as Sarkozy? Judging by the words of Jean-Marie Rausch, the right-wing mayor of Metz who claims to be a *Schumanien* and who recently lost his mayoral position to a Socialist after thirty-seven years in office, this is highly unlikely. Asked in an interview with the author of this thesis if

⁸⁴⁶ Discours de Nicolas Sarkozy, Tours, 10 avril 2007.

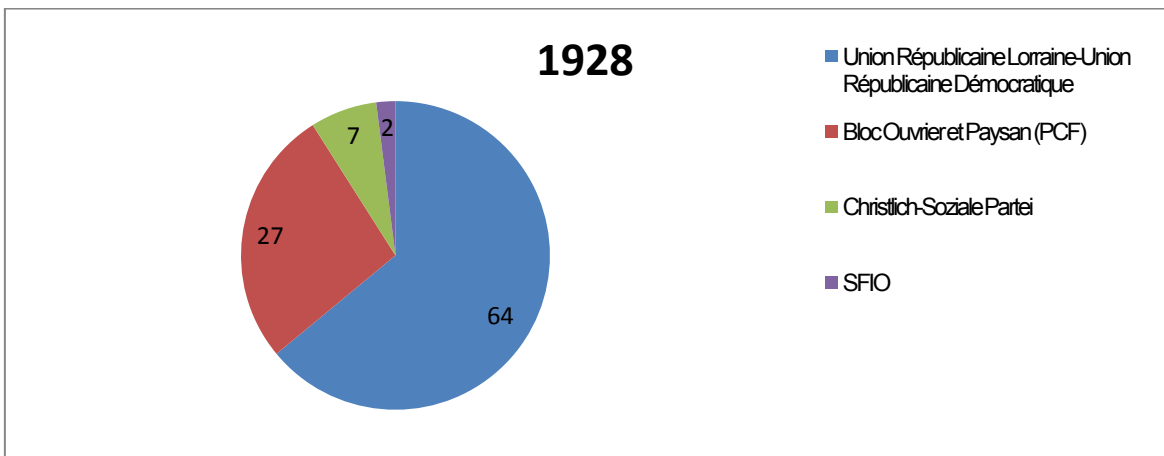
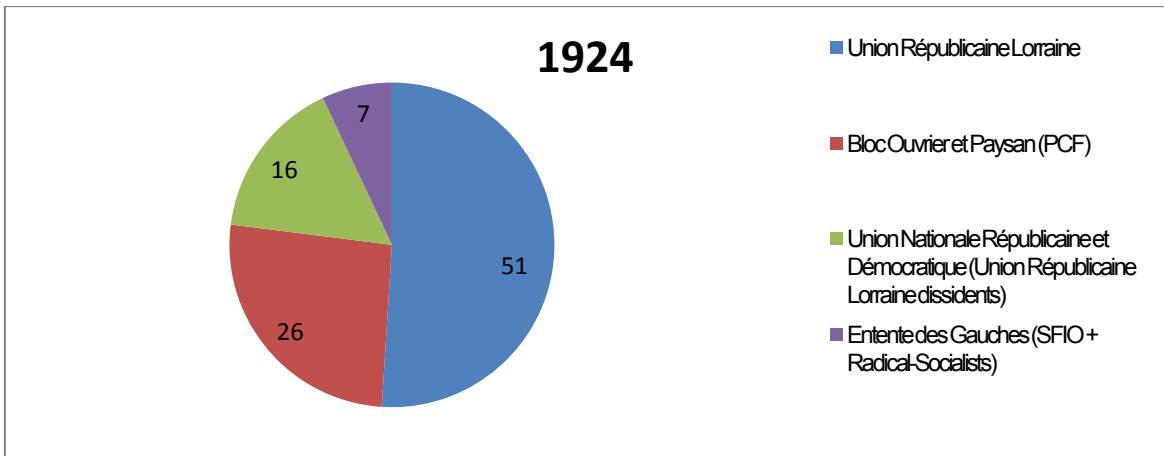
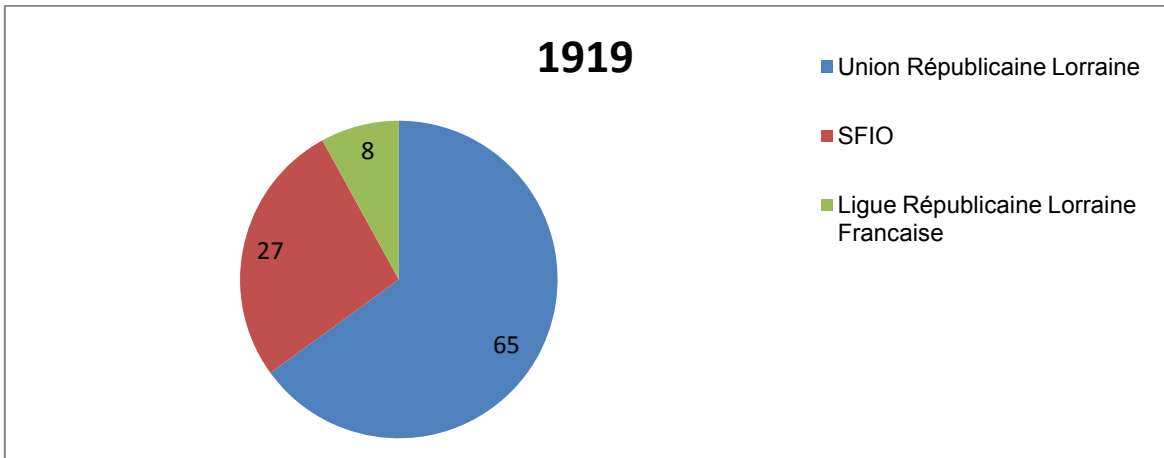
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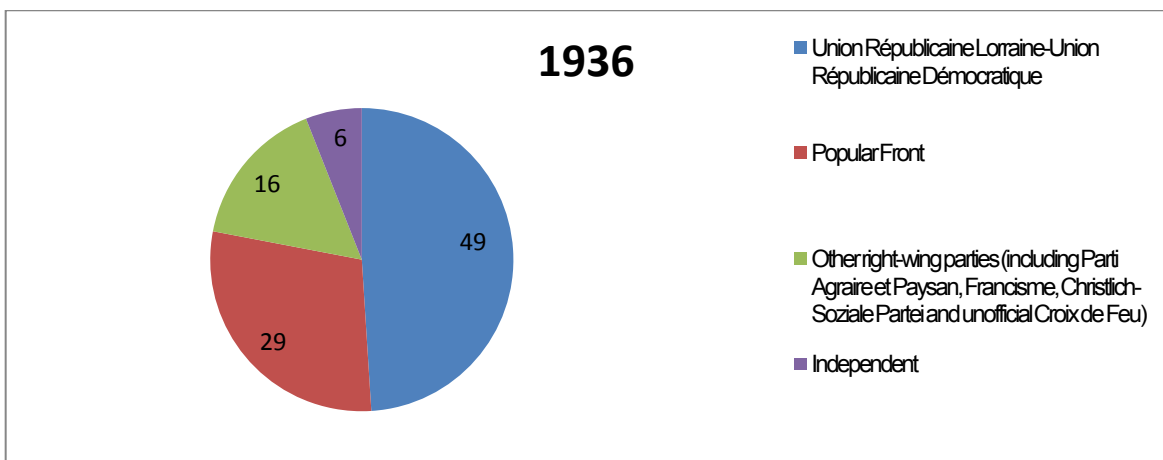
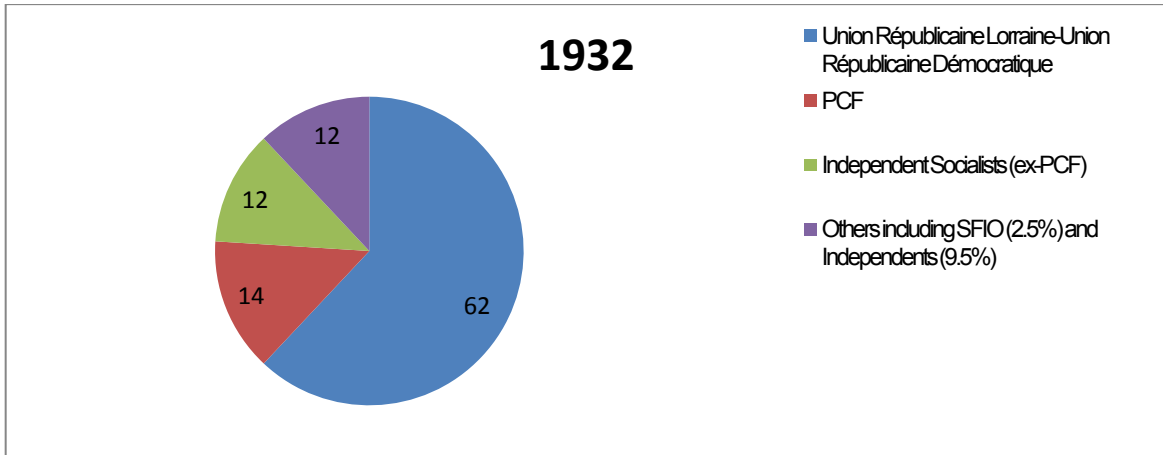
Metz would hold celebrations to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Popular Front, Rausch responded, '*La ville de Metz n'organisera pas de manifestations pour célébrer cette victoire de la gauche.*'⁸⁴⁷ Will the Mosellan capital's municipal council, which elected a Socialist mayor for the first time in its history in 2007, celebrate the eightieth anniversary of the Popular Front in 2016? This remains to be seen. It is, however, more than likely that when Metz and the Moselle celebrate the centenary of the end of the Great War they will also celebrate the province's return to French sovereignty.

⁸⁴⁷ Interview with Jean-Marie Rausch, Metz, 25 October 2006.

Appendices

Legislative Election Results – Moselle, 1919-1936
(in percentage of total votes cast)





Source: Lachapelle, *Elections Législatives du 16 Novembre 1919, Résultats Officiels*, pp.233-235; *Elections Législatives du 11 mai 1924, Résultats Officiels*, pp.152-153; *Elections Législatives 22-29 Avril 1928, Résultats Officiels*, pp.175-179; *Elections Législatives 1^{er} et 8 mai 1932, Résultats Officiels*, pp.175-179; *Elections Législatives 26 avril et 3 mai 1936, Résultats Officiels*, pp.166-170.

The deputies of the Moselle, 1919-1936

1919 – *départemental* single-round electoral list ballot (8 deputies)

Elected candidate	Political affiliation
Charles François	Union Républicaine Lorraine
Guy de Wendel	Union Républicaine Lorraine
Louis Hackspill	Union Républicaine Lorraine
Jean-Pierre Jean	Union Républicaine Lorraine
Louis de Maud'huy	Union Républicaine Lorraine
Louis Meyer	Union Républicaine Lorraine
Robert Schuman	Union Républicaine Lorraine
Robert Sérot	Union Républicaine Lorraine

1924 - *départemental* single-round electoral list ballot (8 deputies)

Elected candidate	Political affiliation
Robert Schuman	Union Républicaine Lorraine
Robert Sérot	Union Républicaine Lorraine
Guy de Wendel	Union Républicaine Lorraine
Louis Meyer	Union Républicaine Lorraine
Charles François	Union Républicaine Lorraine
Edouard Moncelle	Union Républicaine Lorraine
Gaston Louis	Union Républicaine Lorraine
Théodore Paquet	Union Républicaine Lorraine

1928 - *arrondissement*-level two-round single candidate ballot (9 deputies)

Elected candidate	Political affiliation	<i>Arrondissement</i>
Jean Labach	Union Républicaine Lorraine	Boulay
Jules Wolff	Union Républicaine Démocratique	Château-Salins
Victor Doebélé	Bloc Ouvrier et Paysan (PCF)	Forbach
Edouard Moncelle	Union Républicaine Démocratique	Metz 1
Robert Sérot	Union Républicaine Démocratique	Metz 2
Louis Meyer	Union Républicaine Lorraine	Sarrebourg
Henri Nominé	Union Républicaine Démocratique	Sarreguemines
Robert Schuman	Union Républicaine Lorraine	Thionville Est
Emile Béron	Bloc Ouvrier et Paysan (PCF)	Thionville Ouest

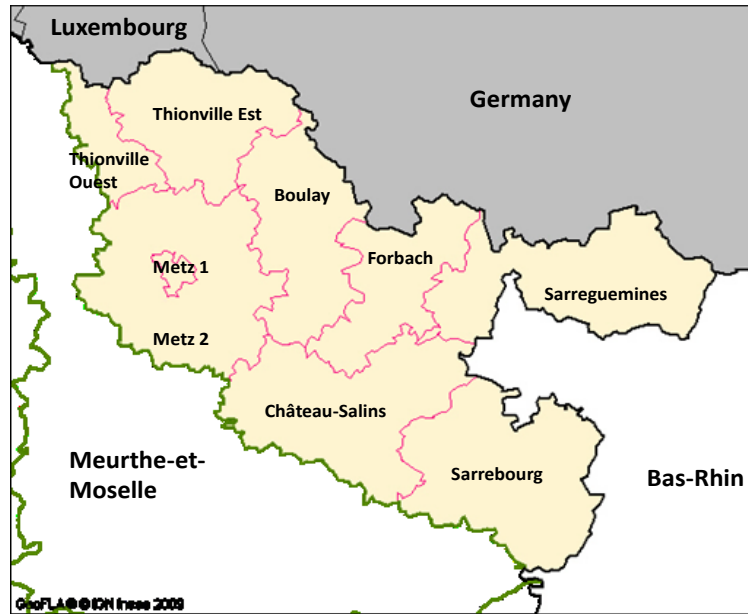
1932 - *arrondissement*-level two-round single candidate (9 deputies)

Elected candidate	Political affiliation	<i>Arrondissement</i>
Alex Wiltzer	Union Républicaine Lorraine	Boulay
Jules Wolff	Union Républicaine Démocratique	Château-Salins
Victor Doebélé	Indépendant Socialiste (ex-Communiste)	Forbach
Edouard Moncelle	Union Républicaine Démocratique	Metz 1
Robert Sérot	Union Républicaine Démocratique	Metz 2
Emile Peter	Union Républicaine Lorraine	Sarrebouurg
Henri Nominé	Union Républicaine Démocratique	Sarreguemines
Robert Schuman	Union Républicaine Lorraine-Parti Démocrate Populaire	Thionville Est
Emile Béron	Indépendant Socialiste (ex-Communiste)	Thionville Ouest

1936 - *arrondissement*-level two-round single candidate ballot (9 deputies)

Elected candidate	Political affiliation	<i>Arrondissement</i>
Alex Wiltzer	Alliance Démocratique	Boulay
François Beaudoin	Parti Agraire et Paysan Français	Château-Salins
Paul Harter	Indépendant Conservateur - supported by the Croix de Feu	Forbach
Edouard Moncelle	Union Républicaine Démocratique	Metz 1
Robert Sérot	Union Républicaine Démocratique	Metz 2
Emile Peter	Indépendant Conservateur - supported by the Croix de Feu	Sarrebouurg
Henri Nominé	Union Républicaine Démocratique	Sarreguemines
Robert Schuman	Union Républicaine Lorraine – Parti Démocrate Populaire	Thionville Est
Emile Béron	Indépendant Socialiste - Popular Front	Thionville Ouest

Electoral Map of the Moselle - 1936



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6. Interview

Jean-Marie Rausch, mayor of Metz, Metz, 25 October 2006.