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# Private Union, Public Conflict: Life and Labor at Michelin in the Twentieth Century

Madeleine Curtis McCabe  
*Bates College*, [mmccabe@bates.edu](mailto:mmccabe@bates.edu)

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Private Union, Public Conflict: Life and Labor at Michelin in the Twentieth Century

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

Bates College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

Madeleine Curtis McCabe

Lewiston, Maine

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines one company, Michelin, and its relationship to the larger stories of corporate and labor history in twentieth-century France. While much of the larger interest in Michelin is rooted in the company's activity in the first decades of the twentieth century, my thesis looks specifically at the moments in which Michelin and its labor came to play an important role in the broader economic and social contexts. Michelin and its workforce drew attention to the firm in an increasingly global context through labor disputes of the late 1930s, their behavior during World War II, their contributions to postwar economic recovery, and the centralization of the European economy.

As France was struck by conflicts that included the Popular Front, Nazi occupation, and the battle for postwar recovery, Michelin's corporate presence endured. Considering the relationship between labor and management before, during, and after World War II, we can see clear continuities in management's program to avoid labor conflict through paternalism and in labor's refusal of this program. Inflected by the collective memory of these traumatizing events, Michelin continued to establish a lasting identity in contemporary France, both as a corporation and in its relationship with its workforce that is recognized to this day.

## Introduction

On February 24, 1936, Édouard Michelin, cofounder of the eponymous French manufacturing firm, saw the red communist flag rise above his factories for the first time. Many years later, Édouard's son Guy recalled his father's reaction to that day. Guy remembered his father's anger seeing the flag above his factories, recalling that "1936 was terrible" for Michelin.<sup>1</sup> Would the politics of this moment pass? Or, was this just the first battle in a long-term war with organized labor for the French tire manufacturer?

The rubber manufacturer based in Clermont-Ferrand, France is a company that has withstood the test of time.<sup>2</sup> From its origins as a small family manufacturing business in the mid-nineteenth century to the multinational corporation it is known as today, Michelin has maintained a corporate structure largely defined by its family origins.<sup>3</sup> As Michelin grew and expanded, their workforce became an increasingly important part of their operations. By the end of the 1920s, Michelin employed roughly 18,000 workers.<sup>4</sup> As Michelin expanded throughout Europe and to North America in the years covered in my thesis, it brought with it its own way of doing business that touched labor across the globe. While Michelin is also widely recognized for its maps and travel guides, my thesis takes a closer look at the tire manufacturing side of their business.

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<sup>1</sup> Paule Muxel and Bertrand Solliers, *The World According to Michelin*, Arte France documentary film, 2001, <http://go.bates.edu/director/wend/?url=http://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=98931&xtid=53607>.

<sup>2</sup> From the beginning, Michelin has been based in Clermont-Ferrand, France, the capital of the Puy-de-Dôme department. The company has played an integral role in the growth and culture of the town.

<sup>3</sup> Brothers André and Édouard Michelin took over the family manufacturing business in 1889. They began manufacturing tires in 1891. See Herbert R. Lottman, *Michelin Men: Driving an Empire* (New York: Tauris, 2004), 17, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/laddbates/detail.action?docID=10133064>.

<sup>4</sup> André Gueslin, "Introduction," in *Les Hommes du pneu: Les Ouvriers Michelin à Clermont-Ferrand de 1940 à 1980*, ed. André Gueslin (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 1999), 9.

Although Michelin's origins are in the mid-nineteenth century, it was the company's actions at the turn of twentieth century that begin to help us understand the shock and horror Édouard Michelin felt when he saw the red flag float over his factories and the company's relationship with organized labor from that point forward, which is my interest in this thesis. Around 1905 Michelin began its own brand of paternalism through which they sought to maintain a sense of control over their workers. Writing on industrial paternalism in France, historian Donald Reid defined paternalism as "not just the set of institutions that employers offer to workers to supplement wages," but also the "techniques used to create and manipulate the affective hierarchical relations" in a manufacturing setting.<sup>5</sup> It is in line with this definition of paternalism that I will reference paternalism at Michelin in the remainder of this thesis. Throughout the beginning of the twentieth century Michelin put several social structures into place that aimed to cultivate and maintain a sense of protection between labor and management. In his introduction to *Les Hommes du pneu: Les Ouvriers Michelin à Clermont-Ferrand de 1940 à 1980*, André Gueslin described how Michelin worked to establish a strong rapport with its workers. Gueslin argued that Michelin-organized schools and summer camps contributed to the "formation of a workforce" for workers' children while health clinics, worker housing, and various associations worked to "maintain that workforce."<sup>6</sup> Through the programs and benefits Gueslin described, Michelin attempted to mold an ideal and loyal worker, a worker that would not join unions or strike. It was because of this work that Michelin was genuinely shocked and horrified by the mobilization it witnessed in 1936.

As a company, Michelin provided many benefits to their labor force before the law asked them to do so. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Michelin increasingly provided

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<sup>5</sup> Donald Reid, "Industrial Paternalism: Discourse and Practice in Nineteenth-Century French Mining and Metallurgy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27, no. 4 (1985), 580.

<sup>6</sup> "la formation d'une main-d'œuvre" and "entretiennent cette main-d'œuvre" from Gueslin, "Introduction," 9.

housing and healthcare for its workers. In 1905 they introduced a health service for workers and their families.<sup>7</sup> While what they provided was nowhere near healthcare in its modern incarnations, it was something for workers, who elsewhere in France had much less. In a comparative history of healthcare systems in the United States and France, historian Paul Dutton explained that in both countries, the early twentieth century marked a resurgence of private-practice medicine.<sup>8</sup> Given the context Dutton provided, France was far from the employer-provided healthcare already at Michelin. Michelin's social protections did not end with healthcare. Writing on the evolution of Michelin-built housing in Clermont-Ferrand, Herbert Lottman noted that laws dating from the early twentieth century encouraged the building of inexpensive housing for workers without sufficient housing. He noted that one commentator remarked that the residences were designed "for the housewife, for she lives in it far more than the worker does."<sup>9</sup> The protections Michelin provided were developed to promote the wellbeing and stability of the family unit, not just for the workers themselves. Over the course of the twentieth century, Michelin either constructed or sponsored almost 8000 family housing units on land surrounding its Clermont-Ferrand factories. Although far from luxurious, the housing Michelin provided encouraged basic hygiene and healthy living habits, providing an adequate amount of space and separate rooms for separate functions.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, as Michelin established these sorts of programs for its workers, it sought to avoid the labor organization and strikes that came to plague the firm's management. The Michelin family brought its own idea of what a relationship should be between corporate management and labor at its factories when the business expanded abroad. Thus, history of Michelin is important to the international

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<sup>7</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 82.

<sup>8</sup> Paul V. Dutton, *Differential Diagnoses: A Comparative History of Health Care Problems and Solutions in the United States and France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 31.

<sup>9</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 83.

<sup>10</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 85.



understanding of France in the twentieth century and to the history of twentieth-century labor politics writ large.

Just as Michelin was working to establish a sense of loyalty with its workforce, the situation of labor in France was changing in unprecedented ways. The interwar period was one of great transformation for the French working classes. While labor was becoming more and more politicized, their bosses, the *patronat*, searched to appease and control their labor force in the midst of global economic crisis. In France, the victory of the Popular Front in May 1936 was a major turning point for labor. When Léon Blum, the socialist prime minister, took office on June 4, 1936 France was in the midst of a massive general strike. The strike was so paralyzing that on June 7<sup>th</sup> Blum invited representatives of the *patronat* and the *Comité général du travail* (CGT), a confederation of trade unions, to his official residence, Hôtel Matignon, to come up with a solution. The resolution of this meeting was the Matignon Agreements, another win for labor. The signed accords aimed to put an end to the general strike and were a major blow to management. For labor, two immediate gains were collective labor contracts and an increase in wages.<sup>11</sup> Reluctantly, representatives of the *patronat* signed these agreements, although their primary motivation was fear.

The establishment of the Popular Front government and the mobilization of labor signified an important turning point in French labor movements of the twentieth century. As this rapid politicization of labor was most visible in the suburbs surrounding Paris, the ring of suburbs surrounding Paris came to be known as the Paris Red Belt. Tyler Stovall, author of *The Rise of the Paris Red Belt*, called to attention the fact that the rise of the Popular Front marked a turning point in French labor movements as it marked the large-scale inclusion of unskilled

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<sup>11</sup> Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy* (New York: Cambridge, 1988), 9.

workers.<sup>12</sup> Including groups such as factory workers, this group of unskilled labor represented a large force in national politics as they mobilized primarily in the form of strikes and factory occupations. The mobilization of labor reached its peak in June 1936. The strikes of June 1936 were larger than any previous annual strike total. Official records for June 1936 reported 12,142 strikes and 1,830,938 strikers.<sup>13</sup> As the massive strikes and occupations disturbed daily life and disrupted production, employers were put in a precarious position, as they feared for their survival and success.

It is within the context of May and June 1936 that I begin my thesis and discussion of Michelin's relationship with labor in its local, national, and international contexts. Chapter 1 examines how the Popular Front era represented a break from the past at Michelin, a break which has continued to shape its trajectory into the future. Leading up to World War II, I contend that both labor's view of management and management's view of labor demonstrated political fears of the time. As Europe prepared for war, workers eventually sided with management. Chapter 2 examines how the war interrupted the trajectory of labor at the firm. By signing collaboration agreements with the Germans, Michelin guaranteed the mutual survival of both management and labor. In this way, the wartime years suggest a return to past behavior both in terms of Michelin's agreements with the Reich and in its undercover resistant behavior. Michelin in the postwar period brings up more questions of continuity at the firm, inflected of course by the implications of the war. Chapter 3 argues that war did not end the struggle at Michelin. Both in terms of the firm's personal losses and relationship with labor, a peace that was desired by many did not come to be. Political fears reemerged alongside fears over labor, however with different political meaning in the early years of the Cold War. Chapter 4 assesses more fully the long

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<sup>12</sup> Tyler Stovall, *The Rise of the Paris Red Belt* (Berkeley: University of California, 1990), 174.

<sup>13</sup> Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, 85.

term continuities of Michelin as the company integrated into the larger global economy. Taking into consideration how Michelin both uses and ignores its own histories is a way to consider both the company's past and how it figures into their continued behavior and expansion overseas.

Together, these chapters seek to address the overarching relationship between labor and management at Michelin, from efforts to implement a paternalistic program before my story even begins to labor strikes that came to be a lens into Michelin for the outside world. The synthesis of labor and management histories at Michelin is important to an understanding of France in the twentieth century due to interest in Michelin both inside and outside of France. Above all, these interests in Michelin are important to the larger story of centralization in terms of the global economy throughout the twentieth century. As Michelin became more and more a part of the global economy over the course of the twentieth century, an understanding of the relationship between labor and management at the company allows for a better look at the political and economic contexts of France.

My original inspiration for this project came from a class I took at Sciences Po in Paris last winter taught by Professor Jean Garrigues. The class examined the relationship between political power and money from the end of the Second Empire to more or less the present day. In the class's treatment of World War II we examined the question of economic collaboration. For a class assignment I read Annie Lacroix-Riz's *Industriels et banquiers sous l'Occupation: la collaboration économique avec le Reich et Vichy*.<sup>14</sup> In her book and in class discussion I was exposed to the complexity of Michelin's economic collaboration and simultaneous resistance. I was fascinated by the dual nature of Michelin's activity during the war, and in particular how both were remembered in the years that followed.

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<sup>14</sup> Annie Lacroix-Riz, *Industriels et banquiers sous l'Occupation: la collaboration économique avec le Reich et Vichy* (Paris: A. Colin, 1999).

Much of the reason why this question of Michelin during the war originally fascinated me has to do with my own family history. Although it does not have to do with France per se, it does have to do with collaboration and resistance during World War II. My grandfather was born in Belgium in 1925 to a Belgian mother and an American father. During the war Germans occupied his family's home. My grandfather joined the Resistance in the later years of the war. In the later years of his life, he has demonstrated a willingness to share with me his memories of the war. The mark his recollections of the war have had on me encouraged me to pursue what I originally thought would be a thesis related to the war.

As I was first considering the question of Michelin I was also considering my own family history. What did I think of my great-great grandparents for letting Nazis into their home? Did my grandfather's time in the Resistance somehow make up for that? It was this synthesis between my own family history and the question of Michelin in a history class at Sciences Po that led me to originally base my thesis on these questions. However, research had other plans for my project. As I engaged with other scholarly work on the war and Michelin in particular, I found that my story to tell about Michelin had to do more with how the company defined its relationship between management and labor from the tumultuous end of the 1930s into the memory of the postwar period. Even though my work has changed from an original focus on the memory of the labels of "collaborator" and "resistant," these themes and considerations are inherently present in many parts of my writing.

As my project evolved from a project specific only to the war and its memory into a longer history of labor and capital in the twentieth century, other scholars have been instrumental in constructing a longer timeline of France in the twentieth century. In distancing my work from the treatment of collaboration and resistance, I turned to works on labor and corporate histories

to create my own longer history of these two groups at Michelin.<sup>15</sup> Inevitably, corporate and labor histories have far different aims in their writing. While I have engaged with histories that do at some level incorporate the two, it is largely in my own research that I have created this history of labor and capital at Michelin.

I have drawn from histories of specific time periods in different chapters to set up the greater political context of labor and Michelin at the given time. Chapter 1 considers more carefully literature on the Popular Front that was also important to my long-term understanding of labor.<sup>16</sup> For World War II covered in chapter 2, I rely on works that contextualized collaboration and occupation including Peter Davies's *Dangerous Liaisons* and Roderick Kedward's and Roger Austin's work published in *Vichy France and the Resistance*.<sup>17</sup> In chapter 3, much of my larger focus was on the international press at that time, as well as secondary literature focusing on the situation of labor following the war, notably George Ross's *Workers and Communists in France*.<sup>18</sup> For the question of memory in chapter 4, Henry Rousso's instrumental work in *The Vichy Syndrome* helped me to establish a timeline for considering the historical memory of France following the war.<sup>19</sup> These histories alongside more general histories of labor and Michelin have allowed me to construct my own history of labor at Michelin. As helpful as they are, these histories do tend to be kept distinct from one another within existing scholarship.

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<sup>15</sup> For labor, see George Ross, *Workers and Communists in France: From Popular Front to Eurocommunism* (Berkeley: University of California, 1982); Stovall, *The Rise of The Paris Red Belt*. For corporate, see Kathryn E. Amdur, "Paternalism, Productivism, Collaborationism: Employers and Society in Interwar and Vichy France," *International Labor and Working Class History* 53, (Spring 1998): 137-163, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27672460>.

<sup>16</sup> See for example Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*; Stovall, *The Rise of the Paris Red Belt*.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Davies, *Dangerous Liaisons: Collaboration and World War Two* (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2004). Roderick Kedward and Roger Austin (eds.), *Vichy France and the Resistance: Culture and Ideology* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> Ross, *Workers and Communists in France*.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

Corporate histories tend to paint an optimistic vision of Michelin's corporate behavior. Herbert Lottman's book *Michelin Men: Driving an Empire* and Paule Muxel's and Bertrand Solliers's documentary *The World According to Michelin* present the company in a way that discuss the disruptions labor caused but do not delve into the root causes or political contexts. Although Lottman's work looks very favorably at Michelin, they did not authorize his work.<sup>20</sup> Even though Lottman glosses over many less glorious moments in the company's history, he does not omit much. He includes basic details of the firm's involvement with the Cagoule fascist group and its involvement in a September 1937 bombing in Paris. Overall, Lottman presents a variety of sources in his research that depict an overarching history of Michelin. Muxel's and Solliers's documentary presents a similar history to Lottman. However, they speak very specifically to Michelin's corporate culture, paternalism at the firm in particular.<sup>21</sup> To accomplish this, their film includes recollections from workers and their descendants. Although Michelin is mentioned in other corporate histories, only these two works focus specifically on Michelin. While these sources specific to Michelin are helpful in understanding the company's history, their treatment of Michelin's century-long history largely excludes the broader discussion of how events at Michelin relate to labor movements and their international consequences.

Other than corporate literature specific to Michelin, there is the discussion of more general French corporate history. In my treatment of Michelin, this history touches specifically on paternalism and corporate culture in France. "Paternalism, Productivism, Collaborationism: Employers and Society in Interwar and Vichy France" by Kathryn Amdur details the history of

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<sup>20</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, ix.

<sup>21</sup> Muxel and Solliers, *The World According to Michelin*.

paternalism in France in the specific period that my work focuses on.<sup>22</sup> Beyond Amdur's treatment of paternalism in interwar and Vichy France, the work of Antoin Murphy in his article "Corporate Ownership in France: The Importance of History" provides broader contextualization of French corporate history.<sup>23</sup> His work includes discussion of Michelin, however his focus is on corporate structure rather than labor. Together, both of these works provide a more general history of French corporate history in the twentieth century. As much as their work is insightful and necessary in my research it largely excludes the discussion of labor. This becomes problematic in that their understanding and analysis of conflict only addresses the perspective of management. In addition to these sources that consider French corporate history, there is the larger consideration of business history as a whole. For this, Philip Scranton's and Patrick Fridenson's *Reimagining Business History* was a helpful resource in considering the field as a whole.<sup>24</sup>

The labor histories I examined focused on both specific moments and long-term trends, yet they exclude the corporate perspective. Several works that look specifically at the Popular Front era helped to examine long-term trends and the beginning of my story at Michelin. Tyler Stovall's *The Rise of the Paris Red Belt* provides a detailed understanding of the origins and broader context of the Popular Front.<sup>25</sup> In addition, Julian Jackson's *The Popular Front in France* further contextualizes labor in the late 1930s.<sup>26</sup> While both of their works are specific to the Popular Front government, their contextualization and understanding of this moment helps to understand later labor movements in my own research. Although they accomplished the

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<sup>22</sup> Amdur, "Paternalism, Productivism, Collaborationism."

<sup>23</sup> Antoin E. Murphy, "Corporate Ownership in France: The Importance of History," *National Bureau of Economic Research*, Working Paper 10716 (2004), <http://www.nber.org/papers/w10716.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Philip Scranton, and Patrick Fridenson, *Reimagining Business History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Stovall, *The Rise of the Paris Red Belt*.

<sup>26</sup> Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*.

aforementioned, they paint a one-sided understanding of the relationship between management and labor.

Aside from labor histories that focus specifically on the Popular Front, more specific pieces on labor have added to my own understanding of labor at Michelin. George Ross's *Workers and Communists in France* provides an understanding of the long-term organization history of the *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT) that was responsible for most labor organization at Michelin.<sup>27</sup> Specifically in understanding labor at Michelin, the collection of essays published in *Les Hommes du pneu: Les ouvriers Michelin à Clermont-Ferrand de 1940 à 1980* explores workers' relationship to the Michelin Corporation.<sup>28</sup>

By combining these histories, bringing together labor, corporate history, and key moments in twentieth century French history in my account of labor and management at Michelin from the 1930s to the late twentieth century, I hope to tell a story of both labor and management at Michelin that addresses the long-term continuities of life at the manufacturer that adds to the general understanding of global labor and corporations in the twentieth century.

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<sup>27</sup> Ross, *Workers and Communists in France*.

<sup>28</sup> André Gueslin, ed., *Les Hommes du pneu: Les Ouvriers Michelin à Clermont-Ferrand de 1940 à 1980* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 1999).



## **Chapter One** **Interwar Conflict at Michelin**

“For some, this was the eve of a long-awaited revolution; for others, it was a monumental threat to French society.”<sup>29</sup>

At the end of the 1930s the world of the industrial *patronat* was seemingly turned upside down as they watched a leftist government gain control and as societal fears over the future of Europe became realities. At Michelin, management thought it had successfully navigated conflicts with labor through the various social protections they provided. However, Michelin was far from insulated from the labor conflict of the late 1930s. Considering both the communist perspective inside of France with *L'Humanité*, the communist newspaper, and an international understanding of events in France through *The Times* and *The New York Times*, it was possible to analyze the effects of events as they were happening in France on labor, management, and the international community. As much as *L'Humanité* must be considered as the official daily of the communist party, the discussions present provided a clear understanding of what labor wanted and how it viewed management. Particularly in moments like the aftermath of the September 1937 bombs, *L'Humanité* clearly demonstrated what fueled labor to act.<sup>30</sup> To sources outside of France, what was happening at Michelin represented the larger conflict with labor in France and the fear of the future of Europe. While accusations of Michelin as fascist in the communist press did speak to labor's understanding of management, it was an accusation that would soon be irrelevant given Michelin's activity during the war. Even though labor eventually fell from

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<sup>29</sup> Pierre Martin, “Industrial Structure, Coalition Politics, and Economic Policy: The Rise and Decline of the French Popular Front,” *Comparative Politics* 24, no. 1 (1991), 45, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/422201>.

<sup>30</sup> On September 11, 1937 a Michelin employee was involved in the planning of a Paris bombing attack orchestrated by the Cagoule, a fascist-leaning, anti-communist group.

power, a decrease in the number of disputes did not mean that conflict with labor was no longer a question at the firm. As Michelin and the rest of Europe prepared for war, the firm as a whole, labor and management, defined itself by working together to help France prepare for the coming reality of war on French soil. Working with this interest in mind, workers sided with Michelin, a move that guaranteed many of them employment and protection in the years to come.

Other authors on this time period at Michelin have primarily focused on how the 1930s represented a break from the past for Michelin. The writings of Gueslin and Lottman on the late 1930s at Michelin have largely focused on labor at the firm in its relationship to the larger labor movement in France. In considering this perspective alongside how labor at Michelin was seen from outside of France, this chapter works to construct the beginning of a longer narrative of labor at Michelin. Above all, this chapter examines the relationship between labor and management at Michelin in the tense moment of the late 1930s not only to consider in what ways the Popular Front era demonstrated a break from that past at Michelin, but more so to consider long-term trends in labor and corporate practices at the firm.

### **A Break from the Past**

Prior to 1936, unions gained little traction in Michelin's factories. Writing of the labor climate at Michelin before 1936, Herbert Lottman noted that the potential power of labor was checked by "the astute carrot-and-stick tactics of the company."<sup>31</sup> Although isolated conflicts occurred before 1936, this year marked a turning point for labor at the company. By June 1936, the situation of labor at Michelin had changed for good as Michelin factory workers took place in massive strikes alongside the rest of the country. Leading up to June 1936, the climate of labor in France and at Michelin was changing. France was recovering from the economic depression

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<sup>31</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 171.

that defined the first half of the decade and production at Michelin was on the rise. However, just as the production of rubber was on the rise, so was the organization of labor. An article from a March 1936 edition of *L'Humanité* titled “The Economic Situation and Worker’s Struggles” contextualized the situation of labor amidst industrial production. Listing current production in several manufacturing sectors compared to the previous year, the production of rubber was up compared to the monthly average for 1935. The communist direction of *L'Humanité* recognized increased economic success as a way to leverage the importance of labor against the power of the manufacturing *patronat*. The author used the article to pose a rhetorical question, asking what was significant between the rising production of rubber and the organization of factory workers at firms such as Michelin, suggesting that labor reforms were beneficial to production.<sup>32</sup> Using this article to understand the position of labor before June 1936, it was clear that labor was increasingly conscious of the force they represented and saw rising production as justification for voicing their demands.

Leading up to the June 7, 1936 Matignon Agreements, workers were mobilizing more and more to assert their desire for better working conditions. One question of debate later addressed in the Matignon Agreements was collective contracts. The May 22, 1936 edition of *L'Humanité* addressed metalworkers, a category that included Michelin, urging for a collective contract. The author described the situation at hand by noting how the largest employers continued to increase their own benefits and privileges at the expense of their workers. The author called out several manufacturers, including Michelin, saying that “misery” and “discomfort” were affecting workers while the *patronat* was seeing their profits increase by the

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<sup>32</sup> “La situation économique et les luttes ouvrières” from “La situation économique et les luttes ouvrières,” *L'Humanité*, March 27, 1936, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4066658/f5.item>.

millions.<sup>33</sup> Clearly *L'Humanité* presented an opinion very much sympathetic to the working cause, however the question of collective contracts that was addressed in this article was a pressing concern. Seeking to guarantee a minimum salary and acceptable working conditions, collective contracts were one of the major concerns addressed in the Matignon Agreements.<sup>34</sup>

In May and June 1936 the largest strikes in the history of France disrupted daily life in unprecedented ways. Official records recorded 12,142 strikes in June 1936, nearly 9000 of the which consisted of factory occupations.<sup>35</sup> Given the sheer number of workers it employed and its position as a large manufacturer, Michelin was far from insulated from the mobilization of labor under the Popular Front. Michelin first felt the severity of the situation in Paris where Pierre Michelin, son of Édouard, was serving as director of Citroën. In Paris, workers went on strike Sunday, June 7<sup>th</sup>, the same day as the meeting at Hôtel Matignon. By Monday, much of the Michelin labor force was on strike. After twelve days of inactivity, management proposed an offer—a modest increase in wages and other protections for strikers.<sup>36</sup> As much as this agreement appeased workers for the time being, it was a blow to Michelin management as they were forced to compromise, just as representatives of the *patronat* were forced to compromise when they signed the Matignon Agreements. While Michelin was only one company affected by the strikes and political climate of May and June 1936, a glimpse into the forced compromise at Michelin is indicative of the situation throughout France. This strike at Michelin alongside growing conflict elsewhere symbolized the growing power of labor in factories, as they

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<sup>33</sup> “Les ouvriers des métaux veulent leur contrat collectif,” *L'Humanité*, May 22, 1936, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k406721p/f5.item>.

<sup>34</sup> The Matignon Agreements guaranteed workers' legal right to strike, removed obstacles standing in the way of union organization, and imposed a 7-12 percent wage increase for all workers. Laws proposed at the meeting and adopted soon after included two weeks of paid vacation and the 40-hour work week.

<sup>35</sup> Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, 85.

<sup>36</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 172.

possessed the power to bring production to a halt, allowing them to demand increased wages and protections.

Despite initial agreements between management and labor, the situation in the factories was far from stable. Union membership drastically increased after the Popular Front victory in June. By December 1936, almost all of Michelin's labor force was part of a union, with three-fourths of the union members belonging to the CGT.<sup>37</sup> Workers' adherence to unions and the rise of the Communist party among labor was particularly evident in Clermont-Ferrand, the center of Michelin's operations. By 1937, the CGT's influence at Michelin had increased even more. In April 1937 *L'Humanité* reported on a CGT victory at Michelin. This victory consisted of Michelin workers reaffirming their allegiance to the CGT. The article reported that the 112 delegates presented by the CGT union got nearly 6000 votes compared to only 72 votes for a conservative union. Writing in the official organ of the CGT, the author optimistically reported that the result exceeded every expectation, elaborating on how management was handedly beaten by this latest victory.<sup>38</sup> As workers organized under the CGT banner, demonstrations continued to be a part of factory life as long as their concerns were left unmet. Workers at Michelin and elsewhere commanded that management and other authorities listen to their demands. The January 17, 1938 *L'Humanité* reported on a demonstration of 6000 Michelin workers in Clermont-Ferrand. In addition to reporting on the size of the protest, the article noted that the protesters also sent the President a telegram asking for more organization representation in the government.<sup>39</sup> More than a year and a half after the first large-scale demonstrations at Michelin, the climate of labor was still such that the CGT could execute a demonstration with 6000

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<sup>37</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 172.

<sup>38</sup> "Magnifique victoire de la C.G.T. chez Michelin à Clermont-Ferrand," *L'Humanité*, April 28, 1937, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k407063x/f5.item>.

<sup>39</sup> "6000 travailleurs manifestent à Clermont-Ferrand," *L'Humanité*, January 17, 1938, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k407328c/f2.item>.

workers. The years following June 1936 clearly demonstrated that workers used the force they knew they represented in the factory to make demands of their employers and to further their cause for the betterment of their own wages and working conditions. Labor's unprecedented mobilization at Michelin and elsewhere demonstrated not only the situation of labor but the larger political context of France and Europe at the time.

### **Fears Beyond Michelin**

The political fears of labor and management expressed themselves in their actions towards the other group, particularly through the lens of fascism. As fascism was a real and perceived threat in this moment, the communist press was eager to label Michelin and other similar companies as fascist. Given the context of the Spanish Civil War and Hitler's rise to power, the label of fascist carried meaning when ascribed to a specific group. This political context played into how the Communist party and labor viewed large industrial employers such as Michelin. A September 1936 *L'Humanité* article called members of the Michelin family and the organization as a whole fascist due to a counter-protest that took place in response to a strike. In response to a workers' strike at Michelin, pro-Michelin demonstrators occupied the regional Puy-de-Dôme prefecture. The author of the article accused the demonstration of being a symbol of the fascists' power and how far management was willing to go to suppress workers' movements.<sup>40</sup> In this instance, it was clear that labor not only viewed the direction of Michelin as fascist, but also vehemently opposed any demonstrations that sought to counter their own, an opinion clearly expressed in the *L'Humanité* article. Above all, management was fighting for a future in which they would be insulated from the disruptive influences of labor, far different

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<sup>40</sup> "Exercice de guerre civile des fascistes de Clermont-Ferrand," *L'Humanité*, September 9, 1936, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k406831b/f1.item>.

from the future labor was fighting for. In the confrontations between management and labor *L'Humanité* reported on the paper clearly illustrated how communist labor forces opposed the vision of management. Another *L'Humanité* article from January 1938 went as far as calling organizations including Michelin enemies of liberty.<sup>41</sup> While communist forces labeling Michelin as fascist spoke to legitimate fears of the time, the label of fascist was also used as a tactic in mobilizing labor to act against management. Even though each side had greatly differing opinions on how to better the workplace, fear played an important role in each of their accusations and actions. As the *patronat* was fearful of a communist future, labor was equally fearful of a fascist future.

Beyond France, the threat of fascism had a different tone that took into consideration the stability of Europe as a whole rather than the actions of one group. As Europe was marked by the serious political consequences of the Spanish Civil War and a changing situation in Germany, outside views of the situation in France spoke to the same fear of fascism addressed in the more global context of European stability. An article in *The Times* of London, for example, brought up fascism in its conversation of strikes in Clermont-Ferrand, yet the point it made was far different from that of *L'Humanité*. Rather than calling the industrial management fascist, the *Times* article warned that if such strikes continued, the public would lose sympathy for the working class, and that such a reaction “might lead to anarchy and finally to Fascism.”<sup>42</sup> This point made in *The Times* conveyed not only international interest in the current situation in France, particularly at Michelin, but also concerns over the political and economic stability of

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<sup>41</sup> “Plus que jamais union du Front populaire,” *L'Humanité*, January 23, 1938, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4073346/f2.item>.

<sup>42</sup> “Renewed Strikes in France,” *The Times* (London), September 9, 1936, [http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=bates\\_main&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS185020201&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0](http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=bates_main&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS185020201&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0).

Europe. In this larger context, discussion of conflict at Michelin in Clermont-Ferrand expressed international interest in the future of France and Europe in the face of the threat of fascism.

*The New York Times* reported on the counter protest at Michelin in an article titled “French Rightists Fight Red Strikes.” Because of this source’s distance from the events, it illustrated a much different understanding of the strikes in Clermont-Ferrand. It stated that 3000 loyal workers seized the Puy-de-Dôme prefecture after 7000 workers seized the factory. Its author contextualized the conflict at Michelin amidst other strikes taking place in France and the broader actions of the CGT.<sup>43</sup> Although the United States was removed from the realities of the labor situation in France, the scope of the article demonstrated how the destabilizing power of labor was having detrimental effects on international political and economic stability. Aside from demonstrating interest in the French labor movement outside of France, the article also revealed a certain level of solidarity many workers felt towards their employer, a fervor Michelin had worked hard to instill. As an organization, Michelin had implemented many programs that attempted to shape their ideal worker and breed a sense of loyalty to the company. They provided long-term benefits for employees and had many sporting and social clubs.<sup>44</sup> Although there were 7000 workers protesting against them, there was also a loyal 3000 that felt so strongly about their relationship with Michelin that they were compelled to act, occupying the local prefecture. Speaking to the mob-like character of the prefecture occupation, the author wrote that “Only the intervention of Pierre Michelin prevented the ugly situation from becoming tragic.”<sup>45</sup> Recognizing that a member of Michelin’s corporate management was able to calm the situation indicated that the “rightist” workers were protesting not only to express their own

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<sup>43</sup> Herbert L. Matthews, “French Rightists Fight Red Strikes,” *The New York Times*, September 9, 1936, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/101778244?accountid=8505>.

<sup>44</sup> Muxel and Solliers, *The World According to Michelin*.

<sup>45</sup> Matthews, “French Rightists Fight Red Strikes,” *The New York Times*, September 9, 1936.



political beliefs but to also due to their respect for Michelin. When Pierre Michelin saw the situation as out of hand and asked them to stop, they obeyed. Far different from the account *L'Humanité* gave of the counter protest, this report illustrated exactly the kind of loyalty that Michelin worked to instill with its employees.

In addition to the *New York Times*' account of the September 8, 1936 protests, the *London Times* also detailed worker loyalty to Michelin in their description of the demonstration. In their description of the September 8, 1936 protests, *The Times* of London reported that 2000 workers took part in an "unusual" counter-demonstration in which they occupied the local prefecture from the morning until 7:30pm. Similar to the *New York Times* account of the demonstration, the author recognized that Pierre Michelin himself played a role in breaking up the protest. The author wrote that at 7:30pm, "leaders of the occupying workmen announced from the balcony that they had decided, at the request of M. Michelin himself, to vacate the building on condition that they were protected from violence."<sup>46</sup> Both the *New York Times* and the *Times* accounts of the counter-protest revealed a different side of the French labor conflict to an international audience. While accounts inside of France focused on the rising power of labor, these international descriptions of events at Michelin conveyed a different perspective, one of loyal workers fighting against the destabilizing power of organized labor. Although these accounts had a different aim in calming international fears, they indicated the importance of Michelin in examining the current situation in France. Beyond their interest in international stability, these reports in *The New York Times* and *The Times* served to contextualize their own labor situations. As the global economy emerged from the Great Depression, both the United Kingdom and the United States struggled with combatting high rates of unemployment. In the United States in particular, the prevalence of unions rose sharply in the second half of the

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<sup>46</sup> "Renewed Strikes in France," *The Times* (London), September 9, 1936.

1930s.<sup>47</sup> In this given context, the mobilization of labor was not limited to France, even though the French situation was much more exaggerated given the current government. Therefore, international interest in French labor was tied to what was happening in the United States and in the United Kingdom at the same time.

As much as the late 1930s were a trying time for the company's relationship with its workers, it did not completely dissolve the relationship between the two. As one author noted in a comparison between communist labor of the 1930s and resistance activity of the 1940s, many workers that were active in 1936 were ones that resisted during the war.<sup>48</sup> As Michelin safeguarded some aspects of its relationship with labor, their trajectory was different from other firms. Amidst discussions of massive strikes, the June 3, 1936 *L'Humanité* also included a section of "victories." One such victory was the guarantee of eight days of paid leave at Michelin's factories in Clermont-Ferrand announced by Pierre Michelin May 28<sup>th</sup>. Although this concession was heralded as a victory in the communist press, it was also claimed that Michelin only made this concession after hearing of the massive strikes taking place in the Parisian suburbs.<sup>49</sup> Although the newspaper discredited the actions taken by Michelin's management in claiming that they were motivated by the actions of the PCF in the Paris suburbs, it was an undeniable victory for labor in their quest for working rights.

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<sup>47</sup> Timothy J. Hatton and Mark Thomas, "Labour Markets in the Interwar Period and Economic Recovery in the UK and the USA," *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 26, no. 3 (2010), 471, doi: 10.1093/oxrep/grq023.

<sup>48</sup> Christian Lamy, "Autour de Michelin: Mémoires," in *Les Hommes du pneu: les ouvriers Michelin à Clermont-Ferrand de 1940 à 1980*, ed. André Gueslin (Paris: Les Editions de l'Atelier, 1999), 295.

<sup>49</sup> "A Clermont-Ferrand, huit jours de congé payés aux usines Michelin," *L'Humanité*, June 3, 1936, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k406733s/f5.item>.

## Management Unfit to Lead

While a portion of its labor remained loyal to the company, Michelin's association with one event on September 10, 1937 seriously compromised their position as an organization and only furthered the cause against them. On the night of September 7, 1937 two bombs exploded in Paris near the Champs-Élysées, targeting the headquarters of the French employers' association and the headquarters of the federation of metal industries nearby, two organizations that represented industrial authority. Although first believed to be the work of the radical left, these bombings were the work of the Cagoule, a clandestine group of right-wing extremists. Cagoule leadership believed that by attacking large business interests the radical left would be blamed and the right-wing and military would in turn take control. The logic of their argument aside, the mastermind of the attacks was René Locuty, an engineer at Michelin in Clermont-Ferrand.<sup>50</sup> In January 1938, several Cagoule members linked to the bombings were arrested and the public gained an increased understanding of how the terrorists responsible were bred by the extreme right. Throughout January 1938, the latest details of the arrests were all over the press. On January 11, *The Times* of London confirmed that the "agents provocateurs" of the September bombings were indeed agents of the extreme right, going so far as to call the bomb plot an "alleged trick by the extreme right."<sup>51</sup> A day later on January 12, *The New York Times* provided an update on the arrests related to the September bombings. After reporting on individuals arrested for their connections to the attacks, the author turned to the workers at Michelin in Clermont-Ferrand, where Locuty had been employed for two years. The author wrote that the

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<sup>50</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 173-174.

<sup>51</sup> "Paris Bomb Plot," *The Times* (London), January 11, 1938, [http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=bates\\_main&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS185152043&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0](http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=bates_main&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS185152043&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0).

workers held “a symbolic quarter-hour strike ‘to protest against terrorists in our midst.’”<sup>52</sup> As updates on the arrests and news of the workers’ actions reached beyond France, the involvement of a right-wing Michelin employee reflected poorly upon the reputation of the firm and only strengthened labor’s action against them, particularly in its connection to a fascist ideology.

At Michelin and beyond, Michelin’s involvement in the Cagoule incident served as an example of how the *patronat* was unfit to lead the country. *L’Humanité* accused those associated with the attacks of participating in a “plot against France.”<sup>53</sup> The communist press was full of remarks, both serious and satirical, against the right wing and its position of power. The front page of the January 23, 1938 *L’Humanité* included a political cartoon of a Cagoule member paying visits to the ministers of public health, foreign affairs, finances, commerce, public works, and justice with a caption that read: “The Cagoule has specialists at their disposal, ready to accept the responsibilities of their authority.”<sup>54</sup> This cartoon addressed the violent nature of the Cagoule’s attacks, as well as the conservatives’ close relationship to political power and authority.



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<sup>52</sup> “French Left Split Over Post for Red,” *The New York Times*, January 12, 1938, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/102376770?accountid=8505>.

<sup>53</sup> “complot contre la France” from “Le complot contre la France,” *L’Humanité*, January 23, 1938, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4073346/f1.item>.

<sup>54</sup> “La Cagoule dispose de spécialistes prêts à accepter les responsabilités du pouvoir,” “Combinaison cagoularde,” *L’Humanité*, January 23, 1938, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4073346/f1.item>.

<sup>55</sup> R. Dubonc, *Combinaison Cagoularde*, illustration in *L’Humanité*, January 23, 1938.

As revelations about the details of the September 1937 attacks continued, the Communist's cause was strengthened and they used the Cagoule incident as leverage as they continued to make demands of management. Workers continued to organize to express what they wanted from management. On February 26, 1938 delegates from Citroën-Michelin met at an inter-factory conference in Paris to discuss their program to better the rights for the firm's 22,000 workers. The March 1 *L'Humanité* summarized the major resolutions that came out of their meeting, most of which were based on suggestions put forth by the CGT. First of all, the delegates asked to grant workers a status that would protect their rights. Secondly, the delegates called for further discussion of collective rights proposed by their union.<sup>56</sup> This meeting and the demands it put forth demonstrated the continued strength of the labor movement in Michelin's factories and that management was still obligated to consider their demands as they continued to organize in such a systematic fashion. Nearly two years after their original mobilization, their continued cry for demands recognized that labor was still not satisfied.

In addition to the demands that labor continued to make, they were also motivated to act on promises that were made by management but never put into practice. *L'Humanité* reported that management had promised 40-hour workweeks for the month of January 1938. The article was written to criticize management for changing its promise of a 40-hour workweek into a 48-hour work week for the week of January 9-14. Written by the CGT union secretary at Michelin-Citroën, the author clearly expressed their dissatisfaction with the management of the firm. He wrote that the management of Citroën and Michelin "want revenge for June 1936."<sup>57</sup> His attitude clearly expressed a continued divide between management and labor, arguing that

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<sup>56</sup> "Les travailleurs de l'usine Citroën-Michelin réclament l'application du programme du Rassemblement populaire," *L'Humanité*, March 1, 1938, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k407371f/f5.item>.

<sup>57</sup> "veut prendre sa revanche de juin 1936" from "Voici la preuve de la préméditation des sanctions chez Citroën-Michelin," *L'Humanité*, January 10, 1939, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4076857/f5.item>.

management's action contrary to the demands of labor was to seek revenge for their massive mobilization. In addition to the authors' comments on Michelin's unfulfilled promise, he mocked the company's philanthropic mission. He accused them of using their supposed philanthropy to cover up their less favorable actions, citing an incident where sick workers contracts were not renewed.<sup>58</sup> The philanthropy the article addressed was a clear stab at Michelin's brand of paternalism. While labor viewed this practice as a way of covering up less actions, management had seen it as a way of appeasing workers to avoid labor disputes. More than two years after the meetings of June 1936 at Hôtel Matignon, this article illustrated how labor continued to demand the promises made to them.

### **Preparing for War**

Even though the decline of the Popular Front helped Michelin regain a sense of control in its factories, it did not mark the end of organized labor conflict at the firm. By 1937, the left in power was becoming increasingly divided leading to Leon Blum's resignation in June 1937. This turning point was also marked by a poor economy with decreased production figures. Rather, the temporary subsiding of labor activity represented the larger political context, one in which the continent was preparing for war.

While 1937 and 1938 clearly marked a change in the tone of organized labor leading up to the war, its effect on life at Michelin was not as clear. One author, Pascale Quincy-Lefebvre, argued that after December 1938, Michelin was once again the "master" of its factories, asserting that management had won in the battle against labor.<sup>59</sup> While 1938 certainly did not mark an end

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Pascale Quincy-Lefebvre, "Le système social Michelin de 1945 à 1973 ou l'épuisement d'un modèle," in *Les Hommes du pneu: les ouvriers Michelin à Clermont-Ferrand de 1940 à 1980*, ed. André Gueslin (Paris: Les Editions de l'Atelier, 1999), 93.

to the organized labor conflict at Michelin, it did mark a turning point after which workers were less mobilized for the communist cause in the years leading up to the war. Another author, André Gueslin, wrote in a history of labor at Michelin that even though workers violently protested the control of their *patronat* in 1936, in 1938 they rejected the new direction of the communist party.<sup>60</sup> As much as the assessments of both Lefebvre and Gueslin spoke to the diminishing power of labor at Michelin, they must be considered in the larger political context. Although the climate of labor at Michelin was changing as Europe prepared for war, 1938 did not mark the end of organized labor at Michelin. Rather labor subsiding momentarily in 1938 was part of the long-term ebbs and flows of labor in its conflict at Michelin. As Europe grew closer and closer to war, the political climate was changing in such a way that labor's demands were not at the forefront of national politics.

At the outbreak of war in Europe, Michelin rallied for the cause of national defense, expanding their workforce and their production. Between 1937 and 1940, Michelin increased its workforce from 8,500 to 10,000 workers.<sup>61</sup> Following the German invasion of Poland September 1, 1939, Michelin drastically upped its production of heavyweight tires and gas masks. Months earlier, in March 1939, *L'Humanité* reported a rumor that Michelin had been asked to make gas masks by the Secretary of Defense. The article revealed that Michelin refused this request, as the author criticized the Secretary of Defense for not forcing Michelin to complete this request for the sake of national defense.<sup>62</sup> Even if Michelin refused this initial request to fabricate gas masks, the reality of the situation was drastically different by September. Questions over labor and its role at Michelin were no longer at the center of debates. As Europe

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<sup>60</sup> Gueslin, "Introduction," 8.

<sup>61</sup> Lionel Dumond, "Le Défi technique," in *Les Hommes du pneu: les ouvriers Michelin à Clermont-Ferrand de 1940 à 1980*, ed. André Gueslin (Paris: Les Editions de l'Atelier, 1999), 19.

<sup>62</sup> "Et les masques?" *L'Humanité*, March 7, 1939, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k407741n/f2.item>.

grew closer to total war, labor was quieted by the demands of national production. Growing and continued employment at Michelin would come to play a very important role in the coming years.



## **Chapter Two** **Life and Labor during the War**

When the French government fell apart, Michelin formally sided with the Vichy regime, signing agreements to deliver its valuable rubber products to the Reich. While division and conflict had defined the 1930s at Michelin, the wartime years were characterized by a sense of unity between management and labor. During the war Michelin found a balance between collaboration and resistance that not only required the cooperation of its workforce, but also guaranteed the mutual survival of both labor and management. This sense of unity was created not only by Michelin itself, but also through the requirements of the Vichy regime. When the Vichy-censored press spoke of Michelin and Clermont-Ferrand, it painted a picture of cohesion that demonstrated the cultural ideals the regime was working to foster. While other sources alluded to what was happening in France in ways that contradicted the Vichy regime, what can be gathered of the war from inside of France was largely seen through the specific lens of Vichy. Vichy's portrayal of Michelin and Clermont-Ferrand during the war was clearly demonstrated in the daily newspaper *Le Petit Journal*. As a source published continuously in Clermont-Ferrand throughout the war, *Le Petit Journal* shed light upon the sorts of events happening around Clermont-Ferrand as they were seen in the eyes of the rest of occupied France. Overall, the French press's treatment of the relationship between industrial firms and their labor sought to encourage a sense of unity between the two in line with national ideals, while reminding both management and labor of their respective responsibilities and obligations. While Michelin did not fit the mold of Vichy's ideal collaborator, they were inevitably at the center of the conversations and themes present in the Vichy-censored press. Beyond France, the press painted a much different picture of what was happening at Michelin and in Clermont-Ferrand. In

the overlaps between what was being portrayed in the censored French press, what was reported abroad, and the undercover actions only widely discovered after the war, the uniqueness of Michelin comes to light. At Michelin, the wartime years brought to the forefront the enduring history of management's paternalism and its relationship to workers. During this time, the relationship between labor and management was defined not by conflict but rather by cohesion that allowed them to survive the war, although this coming together was simultaneously contributing to making France the largest contributor of armaments and products to the Reich.<sup>63</sup>

Outside of France, Michelin was seen in a much more human light, even given its arrangements with the Germans. The international community spoke to instances in which Michelin spoke against the turning tide of European politics and the protections Michelin was able to provide by accepting the consequences of collaboration. Particularly, in considering the tradeoff of collaboration for being able to prevent the departure of many of its workers to forced labor in Germany, it was clear that a unique attitude towards labor persisted at Michelin. While the late 1930s were characterized by contempt and conflict with labor, Michelin's behavior during the war brought to light the paternalistic corporate behavior Michelin had adopted long before the war required it. Michelin's actions during the war spoke to a longer company history with labor, one that was able to withstand the tests of general strikes and the tragedies of war to continue to establish a history once German troops left Clermont-Ferrand.

In the scope of my research, the only time *Le Petit Journal* singled out the Michelin family is upon the death of Édouard Michelin on August 25, 1940. A founder of the tire company with his brother André, the brothers were responsible for transforming the family factory into an industry leader. As seen from both inside and outside of France, Édouard was

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<sup>63</sup> Michael Curtis, *Verdict on Vichy: Power and Prejudice in the Vichy France Regime* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2002), 258.

respected as an innovative and important leader in French industrial society. Passing away at the age of 84, *Le Petit Journal* remembered Édouard as the “creator of the large French tire firm.”<sup>64</sup> Although his passing was mentioned in *Le Petit Journal*, it was not embellished. On the other side of the Atlantic, his passing was commemorated with much different memories of his life. In *The New York Times* the day after his death, Édouard was credited for foreseeing bombing raids and for warning of the danger of German aviation following the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. The author wrote that Édouard and André “called attention to the ease and rapidity with which a peace-time airplane could be transformed into a bomber” referring to how the treaty forbade military aviation but allowed for commercial activity.<sup>65</sup> Being lauded for both his industrial and political contributions to modern society, the American press was much more favorable to discussing how the Michelins differ from other French industrialists. Inside of France, the Michelins were industrialists producing for the Reich. Beyond France, their memory was much more positive, crediting them for having warned against the risk of German aviation and for their contributions to the contemporary world.

### **Clermont-Ferrand in Vichy’s Social Regime**

Beyond this sole consideration of a Michelin family member during the war, appearances of Clermont-Ferrand in the Vichy press served to paint the picture of a unified regime. Throughout the war, *Le Petit Journal* portrayed life in Clermont-Ferrand as similar to life in any other occupied town, emphasizing when the town clearly portrayed the regime’s cultural ideals. *Le Petit Journal* focused on highlighting social values important to the Vichy government

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<sup>64</sup> “créateur de la grande firme française de pneumatiques” from “Mort de M. Édouard Michelin,” *Le Petit Journal*, August 26, 1940, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k637320g/f2.item>.

<sup>65</sup> “Édouard Michelin, Auto Tire Maker: Founded the First Company of its Type,” *The New York Times*, August 8, 1940, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/105402546?accountid=8505>.

including traditional family values, gendered roles in society, faith, and honor to military service. The paper treated Clermont-Ferrand as similar to other occupied towns in that it glossed over any activity that could be seen as subversive to Vichy. In accordance with the paper's agenda as a piece of Vichy propaganda, it increasingly voiced in what ways Clermont-Ferrand was upholding traditional values as the war progressed and resistance activity increased. In this piece of wartime propaganda, Clermont-Ferrand was seen as reiterating Vichy's cultural agenda to encourage a sense of social unity in occupied France.

One particular way Vichy emphasized a sense of cultural unity in Clermont-Ferrand was through religion. Because Vichy focused in particular on building a Christian regime, religion was an acceptable and encouraged theme to discuss in the press.<sup>66</sup> Throughout the war, the editors of the paper upheld religion as an important way to come to terms with the changes in everyday life and to reinforce a traditional societal order. On Bastille Day, July 14, 1940, the front page of the paper reported on an event at the *Notre Dame du Retour* (Our Lady of Return) cathedral in Clermont-Ferrand. The paper described a ceremony held at the cathedral in which family members brought portraits of their sons, husbands, friends that had left for war to be consecrated to the patron saint of travelers.<sup>67</sup> This event addressed the reality of numerous young men heading off to war, and how their families and town were coping with their departure. Instead of reporting on the emotion or distress wives and mothers dealt with as men left for war, this article emphasized a constructive and traditionally acceptable approach to facing such turmoil, to turn to God, and in this case the patron saint of travelers to pray for a safe return. Another specific focus on religion in *Le Petit Journal* was the recognition of a national day of prayer in honor of all those who died during The Great War and the present conflict. Reporting

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<sup>66</sup> For more information on Vichy and religion see W.D. Halls, *Politics, Society and Christianity in Vichy France* (Providence: Berg, 1995).

<sup>67</sup> "Notre-Dame du Retour," *Le Petit Journal*, July 7, 1940.

on this day of remembrance, the November 15, 1943 edition of *Le Petit Journal* specifically acknowledged commemorations in Clermont-Ferrand the day prior. The article mentioned a mass presided over by the bishop of Clermont and emphasized the bishop's message of the importance of recognizing the sacrifice these men made for their country, encouraging all Frenchmen to unite for this cause.<sup>68</sup> Although similar events more than likely took place in most occupied towns, it was small glimpses into life in occupied Clermont-Ferrand that conformed with behavior deemed appropriate by Vichy that allowed the Vichy press to portray a solid, unified image of France under their control.

It was social and cultural ceremonies, such as the consecration of soldiers' portraits and days of prayer that characterized how the Vichy regime was perceived in Clermont-Ferrand rather than economic incentives. Writing in the introduction to a collection of essays titled *Vichy France and the Resistance: Culture and Ideology* Roderick Kedward described that the Vichy regime was "full of political and cultural ideas which had little or no economic consistency." Additionally, Kedward highlighted the emphasis Vichy placed on "provincial traditions."<sup>69</sup> It was clear then why a town like Clermont-Ferrand came to take on such an important role in the construction of the Vichy regime. In detailing culturally conservative events in a town far removed from Paris, *Le Petit Journal* emphasized two important tenets of the Vichy regime described by Kedward. First of all, the return to religion detailed the sort of conservative cultural regime Vichy aspired to create. In addition, the inclusion of Clermont-Ferrand represented a more provincial perspective beyond a large city center. Reporting on instances where the town of Clermont-Ferrand came together to honor soldiers departing for war and those who never returned communicated an image of persistent collaboration and social stability that were

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<sup>68</sup> "La journée nationale de prières à Clermont-Ferrand," *Le Petit Journal*, November 11, 1943.

<sup>69</sup> Roderick Kedward, "Introduction: Ideologies and Ambiguities," in *Vichy France and the Resistance: Culture and Ideology*, ed. Roderick Kedward and Roger Austin (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1985), 1.

essential to the Vichy regime gaining and maintaining control. These ways of portraying life in Clermont-Ferrand addressed not only the needs of the Reich, but also sought to paint a picture of unity that was not necessarily the case. While the paper was published in Clermont-Ferrand, its mentions of the company were extremely limited. Particularly considering Michelin's undoubtable presence in the town, it was even more of a statement that *Le Petit Journal* was nearly void of references to Michelin throughout the war, suggesting behavior that did not conform to Vichy's regime.

### **Michelin and the Collaboration Economy**

Although Vichy placed great emphasis on its cultural agenda, Occupation put great stress on the economic sphere. Specifically, adapting to a wartime economy necessitated changes on many levels. Life at home changed greatly as most working-age men left for war. Women took on different roles while the Vichy regime worked to reinforce traditional social values. Above all, Vichy and the Reich desperately needed the complacent collaboration of the labor force. Adapting to a new social and economic landscape inherently put stress on the labor force as it was forced to comply. Conversation surrounding the collaboration of the working population focused on the economic necessity of the situation, defining social collaboration, and reinforcing traditional social values amidst such change. As the war continued in the years following the original economic arrangements made in the summer of 1940, companies such as Michelin came to understand their arrangement with German authorities as a means of survival, both for themselves as a company and for their workers.

Following the establishment of the Vichy regime in July 1940 there was an immediate need for the French economy to adjust to and accommodate the needs of the Reich. While

economic collaboration was mostly a complicated series of arrangements between the Vichy government, French firms, and the Reich, there was also a need to incorporate the labor that carried out these arrangements at the lowest level.<sup>70</sup> After the establishment of the Vichy government, the French press called French citizens to adapt to the so-called new economy. The first article on the front page of the August 26, 1940 *Le Petit Journal* was all about adjusting to the new economy. The author stressed how the circumstances of war called for the French economy to immediately accommodate for new means of exchange, presumably with Germany. He emphasized the roles of key industries in facilitating the transition to the new collaborative economy between Vichy and the Reich. Addressing private industry, including Michelin, the author wrote that they would focus on producing tools and materials that previously came from abroad.<sup>71</sup> Although Michelin was not specifically producing materials, it was forced to adapt to these changes. For Michelin, this meant that they had to use a different source of synthetic rubber. Michelin and others eventually produced tires made from buna, a synthetic rubber supplied by the Germans.<sup>72</sup> Part of Michelin's agreement with the Germans was that they gave up their stocks of raw rubber in exchange for essential cotton thread produced in German-occupied northern France.<sup>73</sup> Because of these arrangements, Michelin could continue to produce, a role they were encouraged to fully embrace to contribute to the greater German economy.

As the original agreements between Vichy and the Reich lasted for several years, it became clear that the exchange of economic collaboration for company survival allowed firms like Michelin to keep their doors open. Even though much of the outside western world was

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<sup>70</sup> For more on economic collaboration see Lacroix-Rix, *Industriels et banquiers sous l'Occupation*.

<sup>71</sup> E. Pebellier, "L'économie nouvelle," *Le Petit Journal*, August 26, 1940, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k637320g/f1.item>.

<sup>72</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 186.

<sup>73</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 184.

inherently skeptical of collaboration in its involvement with the Reich, by the end of the war it was clear that economic collaboration had allowed many firms to stay open. Writing in *The New York Times* in April 1944, Lansing Warren pointed out how economic collaboration had been a guarantee of survival for many French firms, including Michelin, as occupation had lasted several years by that point. Warren described the basic process of collaboration for large industry, stating that firms “work on a definite contract for the German authorities. The contract is for a stipulated amount of goods. To fill it the French manufacturer receives from the Germans the raw materials that he needs. His labor is assured.”<sup>74</sup> With this understanding of how the basic process worked, Warren continued onto describe the uncertainty of Michelin’s operations, mentioning that the Clermont-Ferrand factory was recently bombed, and that it would likely remain shut until another contract was signed with the Reich.<sup>75</sup> Writing nearly four years into the war, Warren published his article with an understanding of how economic deals with the Reich had allowed companies like Michelin to stay open. Warren’s article expressed how both labor and management benefitted from this arrangement, which was Michelin’s aim all along. As they continued to renew their contracts with the Germans, Michelin guaranteed both its own success as well as protection for its workforce.

Although it was Michelin management that signed official collaboration agreements with the Reich, it was labor that carried out the day to day manufacturing of products to be delivered to the Germans. To bridge the gap between labor and management, Vichy sought to instill a sense of solidarity among all involved. This level of collaboration that Vichy aspired to was the synthesis of many other ideals of collaboration—delivery of goods to the Reich, the application of values deemed appropriate by the Vichy government, and a level of understanding between

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<sup>74</sup> Lansing Warren, “Germans Destroy French Economy,” *The New York Times*, April 4, 1944, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/106756520?accountid=8505>.

<sup>75</sup> Warren, “Germans Destroy French Economy,” *The New York Times*, April 4, 1944.



management and labor. One July 1943 *Le Petit Journal* article took a stab at defining what was the “spirit of social collaboration.” The author insisted upon the necessity of a reconciliation between labor and management. He equated refusing the collaboration of these two groups with choosing civil war.<sup>76</sup> This take on refusing collaboration as leading to civil war was a clear echo of the late 1930s at Michelin and in France. Distancing the Vichy regime from the social turmoil of the Popular Front, this article sought to reinforce a sense of traditional social order which it was encouraging readers to find in the regime itself. At Michelin, the rapprochement between management and labor came in the form of the reemergence of paternalism.

While a sense of solidarity between labor and management was necessary for production, it also spoke to the continued fear of labor turning to communism. An article on social collaboration that appeared in the July 17, 1943 edition of *Le Petit Journal* told readers that they could either give into a regime of social collaboration, or else “communism will prevail.”<sup>77</sup> The paper also reported on efforts in Clermont-Ferrand that specifically addressed the risk of communism. A small article reported that local leaders met July 6, 1943 to address the fight against communism and reported that their efforts were advancing well.<sup>78</sup> Given the political slant of *Le Petit Journal*, discussion of the fear of communism and labor spoke to the broader agenda of the Vichy regime. While concerns over labor were no longer at the forefront of national politics as they were in the years leading up to the war, they were still closely linked to the ideology of Vichy in what one author described as Vichy’s “open hostility to the Left and Trade Unionism.”<sup>79</sup> Although the arrangements of collaboration pushed aside questions over

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<sup>76</sup> “l’esprit de collaboration sociale” from Jean Brumeaux, “Collaboration sociale,” *Le Petit Journal*, July 17, 1943, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6382739/f2.item>.

<sup>77</sup> “le communisme triomphera” from Brumeaux, “Collaboration sociale,” *Le Petit Journal*, July 17, 1943.

<sup>78</sup> “Au Progrès Social Français,” *Le Petit Journal*, July 9, 1943, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k638267g/f2.item>.

<sup>79</sup> Roderick Kedward, “Introduction: Ideologies and Ambiguities,” in *Vichy France and the Resistance: Culture and Ideology*, ed. Roderick Kedward and Roger Austin (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1985), 1.

collective organization at firms like Michelin, the Vichy years remained closely linked to the events of the late 1930s in this way.

### **Mutual Survival**

While Vichy was putting forth a unified vision of Clermont-Ferrand for its own sake, there was another dynamic of solidarity at play in the town. Moving past the conflict of the late 1930s, the war marked the union of labor and capital once again at Michelin. A return to previous times in many ways, this union was marked by a renewed sense of paternalism at Michelin. Throughout the war, it was the firm's paternalistic attitude towards its workforce that allowed for their respective survival. As Lottman described in *Michelin Men*, the corporate leadership prioritized the continued employment of their workers to prevent their departure for forced labor.<sup>80</sup> Aiming to maintain employment, a certain surface level of collaboration allowed for Michelin to obtain the raw materials it needed to continue production and safeguard employment. Michelin's own collaboration slowed down the departure of its workers for forced labor service. In this regard, the question of labor at Michelin during the war was not a question of collaboration or resistance, but rather a mutual sense of dependency. Just as labor relied upon the firm for continued employment to prevent departure to Germany, management too depended on the loyalty of its workforce to carry out its service to the Reich. While wartime actions at Michelin have often fallen under the labels of collaboration or resistance, the larger point was that a renewed sense of cohesion between labor and management allowed for their collective survival that allowed Michelin to move forward in the years that followed the war.

Michelin's priority to maintain employment for its workers came into conflict with the question of German-imposed forced labor. By 1943 the German economy was in need of fuel

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<sup>80</sup> Lacroix-Riz, *Industriels et banquiers sous l'Occupation*, 628.

and needed to look beyond Germany for labor. A subject that pervaded all discussion of Michelin's relationship with their workers throughout the war was the institution of forced labor first through the *relève* and later on the *service du travail obligatoire* (STO).<sup>81</sup> Although more informal arrangements for the provisions of labor existed earlier on in the war, the STO officially began in February 1943 as a means of both compulsory and forced labor to be provided to the Reich. As Peter Davies discussed in his book *Dangerous Liaisons: Collaboration and World War II*, slightly less than four percent of the working population of France was exported to Germany for labor, approximately 800,000 people total by the end of the war.<sup>82</sup> Employing roughly 10,000 workers in 1940, Michelin's managing director, Robert Puiseux, prioritized the needs of the firms' workers, protecting their jobs and stopping or delaying departure to Germany.<sup>83</sup> Even though Michelin was working to prevent departure to Germany, it was the existence of institutions and arrangements like the STO that fuelled their behavior and grounded the renewed sense of paternalism at the firm.

Even before laws specifying forced labor inscription were finalized, the Vichy government made several urgent requests of workers, continually insisting upon their cooperation and a sense of mutual sacrifice. In the fall of 1942, the French press made several urgent pleas to workers. The top of the front page of the October 21, 1942 *Le Petit Journal* emphasized the recruitment of manual labor with a transcribed speech from President Laval called "President Laval makes an urgent appeal to workers."<sup>84</sup> This urgent plea to workers' cooperation at the same time formal structures of labor recruitment were coming into play was a continued attempt on the part of the Vichy government to exert social control over the direction

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<sup>81</sup> STO was the forced enlistment and deportation of French workers sent to Germany during World War II.

<sup>82</sup> Davies, *Dangerous Liaisons*, 138.

<sup>83</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 184.

<sup>84</sup> "Le président Laval adresse un pressant appel aux ouvriers" from "Le président Laval adresse un pressant appel aux ouvriers," *Le Petit Journal*, October 21, 1942, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k638046s/fl.item>.

of France under the Reich. In this pressing appeal to labor, Laval emphasized the need to execute a policy of compromise with Germany and to unite behind the Vichy government and obey its orders, in this case be obedient workers and fulfill its unmet labor demands. Near the end of the speech, Laval made a final request of the workers he was addressing. He spoke directly to the labor force saying, “it is your task to take back with your tools what France lost for weapons.”<sup>85</sup> Charged with the duty of reclaiming what had been taken from France, Laval recognized and stressed the importance of instilling a sense of solidarity with the workforce. For Michelin, Laval’s appeal demonstrated the intense outside pressure for labor as part of life in occupied France.

In the second half of February 1943, the number of workers departing Clermont-Ferrand for forced labor increased.<sup>86</sup> *Le Petit Journal* at this time increasingly emphasized the application of the STO law and to whom it applied. The paper’s insistence on the necessity of compliance indicated the tense atmosphere surrounding labor at that time. While the paper did not delve into the specifics of departure for forced labor, its insistence upon obedience to the law indicated the sheer necessity for it. Specifying that the law applied to all young men born between 1920 and 1922, the February 16, 1943 edition of the paper emphasized that the enforcement of forced labor was the application of a law created in September 1942.<sup>87</sup> In the second half of February 1943, the majority of *Le Petit Journal* front pages included a feature on the application of the STO law. In this context, the Vichy press was a direct reflection of the increased demands of the Reich. For Michelin, these external pressures challenged their own operations as labor was a much needed commodity.

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<sup>85</sup> “il vous est donné de reprendre avec vos outils ce que la France a perdu pour les armes” from “Le discours du président Laval,” *Le Petit Journal*, October 21, 1942, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k638046s/f2.item>.

<sup>86</sup> Lacroix-Riz, *Industriels et banquiers sous l’Occupation*, 628.

<sup>87</sup> “D’importantes mesures ont été prises par le Conseil des Ministres,” *Le Petit Journal*, February 16, 1943.

While the paper did not mention Clermont-Ferrand as a specific point of departure or as a target, it generally did not disclose such information for any town. There were no records within the scope of my research that showed an increase in the number of departures from Clermont-Ferrand during the second half of February 1943. Nevertheless, fears surrounding the uncertainties of departure for STO service pervaded the French press at this time. Given their unique relationship with their labor, Michelin's corporate leaders stood between the Vichy government putting the forced labor law into action and average workers' uncertainty over where the fulfillment of their STO service would take them. Visible in the discussions of fulfilling STO service was the fear of being required to complete this service in Germany. On the front page of the February 24, 1943 *Le Petit Journal* was another article concerning the application of the STO law. The clarifications this article offered to its readership sought to condemn the general belief that all labor service would be fulfilled in Germany. The author wrote, "Despite these clarifications, certain rumors that foreign radios have tried to instill in popular opinion lead the public to believe that all young people called for service—except farmers—will be sent to Germany. We repeat that nothing is more inaccurate."<sup>88</sup> In addition to this clarification, the paper specifically addressed which kinds of workers were fully exempt from being sent to Germany. These workers included: coal miners, firefighters from the cities of Paris, Lyon, and Marseille, state police agents, SNCF (national railway) workers, and students who obtained a suspended call of duty.<sup>89</sup> The nature of these precisions indicated a true fear for both the work the STO would entail and where workers would be sent. As *Le Petit Journal* explained, Michelin workers were part of a larger category of workers that risked being sent to Germany if

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<sup>88</sup> "Malgré ces précisions, des rumeurs que certaines radios étrangères ont tenté d'accréditer dans l'opinion tendent à faire croire que tous les jeunes gens ainsi appelés—sauf les agriculteurs—seront envoyés en Allemagne. Répétons que rien n'est plus inexact." from "Précisions sur le service obligatoire du travail," *Le Petit Journal*, February 24, 1943, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6381539/f2.item>.

<sup>89</sup> "Précisions sur le service obligatoire du travail," *Le Petit Journal*, February 24, 1943.

called upon for STO service. Therefore, as the risk of being sent to Germany materialized as labor institutions were formalized, Michelin continued a sense of paternalism towards its workers to hopefully prevent their departure.

As much as the institution of STO laws implied a personal responsibility to enlist if born between the given dates, conversation surrounding the application of the February 1943 law included the employers' responsibility to get their workers to enlist. Given that Michelin had provided cover for workers in order to avoid labor service, such orders on behalf of the Vichy government put the Michelin management in a difficult position. Throughout the summer of 1943, *Le Petit Journal* frequently included reminders to go to the town hall and fill out the required paperwork for inscription in the labor service. In addition to the reminders the press gave to workers, it also warned employers of their own responsibility. After refreshing its readership of the given terms of the labor law, the article alerted managers how they should encourage complacent behavior. The article read, "the attention of commercial and industrial company heads is drawn to the liability that they incur or may incur in this regard."<sup>90</sup> By reminding company managers of the liability they exposed themselves to if they did not do all in their power to enlist their workers that are of age, the Vichy government sent a stern warning to them as being at risk. In turn, this discussion of management's responsibility in forced labor arrangements directly concerned the risk Michelin was exposing themselves to in providing cover for its workers.

In fact, the type of risk the article alluded to was the same kind of activity Marcel Michelin was arrested for the same month as this article's publication. Born in 1886, Marcel's father, André, cofounded the tire firm alongside his brother. Marcel was actively involved in

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<sup>90</sup> "l'attention des chefs d'entreprises industrielles et commerciales est attirée sur la responsabilité qu'ils encourent ou peuvent encourir à cet égard" from "Le service du travail obligatoire et les départs pour l'Allemagne," *Le Petit Journal*, July 17, 1943, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6382739/f1.item>.

Michelin operations his entire life and worked to create a sense of paternalism at the firm. During the war, Marcel was the most active resistant in the Michelin family, providing refuge in the forest for workers at risk of being sent to Germany and organizing local resistance groups.<sup>91</sup> In understanding the activity that led to Marcel's arrest and considering the responsibility the Vichy government placed on employers, it was clear that the undercover activity at Michelin went unnoticed by the censored press until his arrest.<sup>92</sup> Although conversations surrounding the compliance of the working French population to fulfill their labor obligations focused on their compliance to foster a sense of unity, one must also bring employers' risk and responsibility into consideration. Considering the Michelin's actions alongside the urgent pleas of the Vichy government communicated in the press, it was clear that workers' actions in fulfilling their STO requirements and the risk employers exposed themselves to were inherently intertwined.

While the Vichy regime worked hard to create and maintain a unified vision of Clermont-Ferrand inside of France, it necessarily excluded any mention of activity that was in any way subversive to the stability of Occupation. In the case of Michelin, this vision of Clermont-Ferrand omitted any mention of resistance activity within the town and at Michelin. It was only in looking at moments reported in the paper with acquired knowledge that it was possible to consider how events reported on in *Le Petit Journal* related to the other side of the story. One moment such an understanding came to light was when the Michelin factory was bombed in March 1944. The night of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of March, 1944, Royal Air Force Lancaster planes targeted the factories of Clermont-Ferrand, including Michelin. Dropping six-ton bombs called "factory busters," the RAF bombers succeeded in severely damaging the Michelin factory.<sup>93</sup> In the days following the bombings, both *Le Petit Journal* and the American press commented on

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<sup>91</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 185.

<sup>92</sup> Marcel was arrested in Clermont-Ferrand in July 1943 and later died at the Ohrdruf camp.

<sup>93</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 187.

the destruction caused by the attacks. The front page of the March 18, 1944 edition of *Le Petit Journal* reported in great detail on the Anglo-American bombings. It stated that the first bombs dropped at 10:50pm, subsequently destroying many homes and housing structures in the neighborhood, including workers' housing. This first report estimated around 20 deaths and 40 injuries.<sup>94</sup> However, absent from this first report was any information on damaged manufacturing facilities, rather focusing on the people affected by the attacks and how their situation was being handled. The same day, an article in *The New York Times* detailed specific damages to the Michelin factory. Their article titled "Enemy Blasted From West" reported that the RAF attacked the Michelin Rubber Company factory at Clermont-Ferrand, noting that it was one of the most productive rubber producers in Europe. The author indicated that the precision of the bombing was possible as the Michelin factories "had been ringed by flares" and that pilots reported seeing the target perfectly outlined.<sup>95</sup> Neither the Michelin plant as a target nor the perfectly outlined target were mentioned in *Le Petit Journal's* accounts of the attacks. The organized nature and precision of the bombings suggested the possibility that someone on the ground in Clermont-Ferrand aided the RAF bombers in the execution of their attacks. While sources beyond *Le Petit Journal* suggested the specific involvement of Michelin in these air raids, the interest of Vichy was in portraying the RAF bombings as an allied attack against the town. For the sake of a unified Vichy regime in Clermont-Ferrand, the vested interest was in creating a sense of unity among the townspeople rather than creating a divide between the town and Michelin.

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<sup>94</sup> "Clermont-Ferrand est bombardé par l'aviation anglo-américaine," *Le Petit Journal*, March 18, 1944, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6384796/f1.item>.

<sup>95</sup> "Enemy Blasted From West," *The New York Times*, March 18, 1944, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/106884276?accountid=8505>.



While there was no clear evidence of how these attacks were carried out with such precision, Lottman pointed out that the air attack could have been avoided. He wrote that Henry Ingrand, the combat movement chief of *Mouvement Unis de Résistance* (Unified Movements of the Resistance) of Auvergne, had been in contact with the British special intelligence. Thanks to his Michelin contacts, Ingrand met with Michelin's general manager to explain that if Michelin workers could help sabotage the factory on the ground, an air raid could be avoided. The manager's answer to Ingrand's request was no.<sup>96</sup> While the firm may not have aided in helping local resistance leaders orchestrate sabotage on the ground, members of the company carried out other acts of resistance. Most resistance-specific activity at Michelin revolved around Marcel Michelin, son of co-founder André. Marcel created a refuge for factory workers 20 miles outside of the town, and two of his sons, Philippe and Hubert, fled France and joined the Royal Air Force as pilots.<sup>97</sup> Although it is alleged that Michelin management would not agree to help orchestrate factory sabotage as Lottman suggested, the family remained resistant through an array of activity despite their surface level of collaboration with the Reich. While it is clear that many of these details of their acts of resistance are only clear long after the fact through biographical work on the Michelin family and other outside sources, these happenings at Michelin worked to contradict the very sense of cohesion Vichy was aiming to create.

The war marked several inevitable changes to life at Michelin and in Clermont-Ferrand. As Michelin accepted the terms of economic collaboration with the Reich, it found itself in many ways at the center of the regime Vichy was trying to create. However, in private, Michelin returned to its past sense of paternalism to define its relationship with its workers. While Michelin inevitably straddled the labels of collaborator and resistant during the war, it was not

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<sup>96</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 188.

<sup>97</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 185.

these terms that defined the company during the war. Rather, it was the dynamics of Michelin's longer company history. As the war put a pause to larger labor movements, it brought to light the paternalism Michelin had spent decades working to establish. The reemergence of this practice during the war allowed for the survival of Michelin as a company and its workers as individuals. Yet, the security wartime paternalism provided would not last.

### **Chapter Three** **Michelin in the Aftermath of the War**

On June 6, 1944, Michelin landed in Normandy. American officers each landed on the beaches of Normandy with a *Guide Michelin* in hand.<sup>98</sup> Even after nearly four years of collaboration with the Germans, Michelin remained a respected authority among the Allied forces.<sup>99</sup> Michelin did not wither away during the years of German occupation. As Michelin got back to work, life at Michelin was defined in two ways. First of all, Michelin had to grapple with the implications of the war. As a family, Michelin mourned tragic losses. As a company, Michelin dealt with the wartime labels of collaboration and resistance as they tried to redefine their company identity. Beyond the family tragedy of the war, Michelin was in this latter respect at odds with labor once again. Even though Michelin's paternalism was a lasting characteristic of the manufacturer, it was seen in a more positive light throughout the war. In the years that followed, labor organized itself in ways that were strikingly similar the the years leading up to the war. It came back under fire in the years that followed. Rather than a complete departure from the past, the postwar period brought to light lasting continuities in Michelin's relationship with labor both in terms of Michelin's own paternalism and labor's response to it.

Primary sources for the examination of Michelin after Liberation were limited and different from what newspapers were published before and during the war. The established French press was heavily controlled and censored during German occupation. Above all, examining the French press before and after the war presented the problem of continuity.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 190.

<sup>99</sup> Before the war Michelin produced maps for the French Army, working to produce maps for countries not yet covered by Michelin including the Netherlands and Norway. See Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 177.

<sup>100</sup> In 1944, the Free French government eliminated all papers that had continued to publish for more than 15 days after the Allied invasion of North Africa and subsequent German takeover of free Southern France in part to

While *L'Humanité* was still in publication and wielded a wide influence in the postwar period, access to its archives for this period is limited. Given these limitations in examining the press within France for this period, the international press including *The Times* and *The New York Times* provided the best glimpse into what was happening with Michelin and in Clermont-Ferrand at this time. Looking at labor unrest through these international sources indicated a larger concern for the economic recovery of France and for the general fear of communism in the early years of the Cold War. In the 1930s these fears focused on the threat of fascism and war in Europe. After the war, these fears spoke to the imminent fear of communism taking hold in Europe.

### **Damages of the War**

Clermont-Ferrand was liberated August 27, 1944 through the work of the French Forces of the Interior (FFI).<sup>101</sup> News of the liberation of Clermont-Ferrand reached the United States a few days later. An article in the August 31<sup>st</sup> *New York Times* detailed the German retreat, attributing the success in Clermont-Ferrand to the direction of General Koenig and the work of the FFI.<sup>102</sup> In their retreat, the Germans destroyed the Crouël powder keg and the Place des Bughes.<sup>103</sup> These minimal damages aside, there was one incredibly important absence in the liberation of Clermont-Ferrand—executions. The FFI's directions for the liberation of Clermont-Ferrand forbade executions.<sup>104</sup> Across France, executions during liberation were a physical reminder of the shame associated with having collaborated with the Germans. In France, 9,000

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eliminate the French press of influences that could be labeled as collaborators. See Clyde Thogmartin, *The National Daily Press of France*, (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 1998), 142.

<sup>101</sup> Paris was liberated August 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>, 1944.

<sup>102</sup> "Free 4 More Towns," *The New York Times*, August 31, 1944, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/106982571?accountid=8505>.

<sup>103</sup> Sébastien Kerroux, "Il y a 69 ans, Clermont-Ferrand était libérée," *France 3 Auvergne*, August 25, 2013, <http://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/auvergne/2013/08/25/il-y-69-ans-clermont-ferrand-etait-liberee-306665.html>.

<sup>104</sup> Kerroux, "Il y a 69 ans, Clermont-Ferrand était libérée."

collaborators were executed during the liberation campaign. 1,500 more were executed after trial, and 40,000 were sentenced to time in prison. Most of these executions and trials focused on the most visible members of the Vichy regime. In general, civil servants and businessmen were spared, often by making claims that they were simultaneously working for the resistance.<sup>105</sup> While the absence of executions would have likely excluded Michelin because of their claims to the resistance, their absence was important in that it allowed Michelin to escape the label of collaborator from the beginning.

Just as Michelin was fortunate to escape executions both during liberation and in its aftermath, they were also spared from any formal judicial proceedings. No formal case was ever made against Michelin for its wartime collaboration. Lottman commented that the archives he examined “contain no files on the Michelin family hierarchy or on any of its non-family directors, suggesting that a case could not have been made against anyone in charge.”<sup>106</sup> This demonstrated that although Michelin did collaborate in a number of ways, their collaboration activities were not important to the purification of France that followed the war. In its identity as a collaborator, Michelin escaped both executions during liberation and later trials. The fact that no formal case was brought forward against Michelin does not mean that the firm’s collaboration with the Reich was not recognized. Rather, as seen in the previous chapter, many argued and remembered how Michelin’s surface level of collaboration saved the departure of many of its workers for forced labor service in Germany. Remembering Michelin in this way made for an easy connection between collaboration and resistance, with the focus being on the latter.

Despite their apparent collaboration, the Michelin family risked their own lives to carry out resistance activities. The most telling tragedy of this time period for the Michelins was the

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<sup>105</sup> Robert O. Paxton, “Vichy on Trial,” *The New York Times*, October 16, 1997, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/109807886?accountid=8505>.

<sup>106</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 191.

arrest, internment, and death of Marcel, the most notable activist in the family. Arrested alongside his son in July 1943, Marcel died at the Ohrdruf concentration camp of pneumonia in January 1945. His son, Jacques, survived and would be liberated from the Flossenburg camp by General Patton in April 1945.<sup>107</sup> In addition to the arrests of Marcel and Jacques, a 1972 article cited the internment of another family member at Ravensbruck.<sup>108</sup> Two of Marcel's sons, Philippe and Hubert, were Royal Air Force pilots in Britain during the war. Resistance groups organized by Marcel reached London and Algiers.<sup>109</sup> While such tragedy was exponential in Europe, news of these Michelin family tragedies reached the international press. *The New York Times* reported on the death of Marcel in a camp nearly three months afterwards.<sup>110</sup> Even though much of the Michelin family's resistance activity ended in horrible tragedy like the death of Marcel in internment, his legacy lived on, a legacy fueled perhaps by the need to demonstrate Michelin's contribution to the Resistance.

## **Back to Work**

The war cast a long shadow on the years to come at Michelin. Alongside the rest of Europe, the postwar period was a time of reconstruction at Michelin, both in terms of a physical and an economic recovery. Although the war was over, a different sort of battle was beginning—the battle of production. In the postwar period, steady production at Michelin was an absolute necessity to ensure the future of the firm, France, and Europe. The first step in getting back to work was repairing the damages of the March 1944 bombings. The Allied

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<sup>107</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 186.

<sup>108</sup> Clyde H. Farnsworth, "Michelin and a City in France: Company Wields Influence in Area," *The New York Times*, June 11, 1972, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/119569468?accountid=8505>.

<sup>109</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 185.

<sup>110</sup> "Michelin Died in German Camp," *The New York Times*, April 26, 1945, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/107099452?accountid=8505>.

bombing nearly destroyed one of Michelin's largest factories in Clermont-Ferrand. Success of Michelin postwar was dependent on their ability to produce, which in turn rested on their ability to rebuild the damaged factory. Fortunately, by the end of 1946 the plant was rebuilt and producing more than it ever had. Given that France was in a state of economic despair, Michelin ensured their postwar success right away by working with American armed forces. Part of their program for economic recovery was producing tires for American troops still fighting elsewhere in Europe.<sup>111</sup> This immediate plan to recover represented Michelin's direction towards the future. Almost immediately, they had gone from producing for the Germans to producing for the Americans.

Alongside the rebuilding of the damaged factory, Michelin got back to business working on a product that would come to define its postwar success. Michelin had long strived to develop and introduce a new tire to the market. The development of "pneu X," Michelin's radial tire was crucial to their postwar economic success.<sup>112</sup> Coming out of the war, Lottman argued that the development and production of their new tire "confirmed that Michelin possessed ideas, processes and machinery that others did not have."<sup>113</sup> While the tire was not introduced to the mass market until June 1949, its development was at the center of Michelin after 1945. It was a mark of innovation that carried Michelin into a new era. Above all, Michelin's new radial tire was a symbolic victory for the firm. After years of struggling to perfect its design and the interruption of the war, the launch of the radial tire signified that Michelin was back on top.

Even though "pneu X" represented the sense of innovation that would carry Michelin into the future, its development perpetuated preexisting stereotypes of the firm. The sense of secrecy

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<sup>111</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 192.

<sup>112</sup> Michelin was the first to patent the radial tire. A radial tire allows the sidewall and tread of the tire to function as two separate features. See "Radial vs. Bias Technology," Michelin Agricultural Tires, <http://www.michelinag.com/Innovating/Radial-vs.-Bias-technology>.

<sup>113</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 192.

that surrounded the development of the new radial tire preserved the image of Michelin as a secretive organization. “Secretive” had long been a term used to criticize Michelin’s corporate behavior.<sup>114</sup> Criticism for being secretive was not the only mark of continuity that went with Michelin into the future. The labor conflict that defined Michelin in the years leading up to the war made its return in the years that followed.

Just as Michelin was getting back to work, so were trade unions. Even though the end of the war brought a sense of peace to life in Clermont-Ferrand, it did not mean peace with labor. In the years following the war, General Confederation of Labor (CGT) membership skyrocketed. CGT membership postwar topped numbers of the Popular Front era. The CGT went from 1.5 million members in 1939 to a record high of 6 million members in 1946.<sup>115</sup> The revived activity of the CGT at the firm demonstrated the continued interest of labor in the firm. While the war had paused the activity of organized labor for obvious reasons, its revival in the postwar period illustrated the endurance of organized labor at Michelin. In the years that followed the end of the war, Michelin workers continued to organize in ways that were strikingly similar to the Popular Front era, setting the stage for labor at Michelin in the years to come.

At Michelin and elsewhere, labor demands came through the company chapter of the CGT. The CGT wielded a wide influence, as it was a national confederation of unions that operated on a very local level. While it was the same institution that orchestrated strikes at Michelin in the late 1930s and late 1940s, the CGT was not in the same position after the war as it had been in the Popular Front years. As France struggled to rebuild itself after years of German occupation, steady production was key. While the CGT clearly had their own agenda, vying for better wages and conditions (mostly their gains that were lost when the Popular Front

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<sup>114</sup> Critiques of Michelin as secretive will be explored in more detail in chapter 4.

<sup>115</sup> Ross, *Workers and Communists in France*, 28.



fell from power), they were also part of a larger picture that required them to use their organizational power to increase production. As George Ross described in his book *Workers and Communists in France*, the main goal of the CGT after liberation was to win the “battle of production.”<sup>116</sup> While the war in Europe was wrapping up, a new battle was beginning in France, one for economic recovery. Even though the CGT had its own goals, the largest goal was the recovery of France. One slogan of the CGT at this time was “work hard first, then ask for concessions.”<sup>117</sup> As the head of the CGT indicated with their slogans, they were putting their own agenda behind national production, choosing to first demonstrate the importance of their role in the economic recovery of France. This arrangement of communists (the CGT included) working alongside the coalition government lasted until May 1947 when the communists proclaimed their support for a strike at Renault and were subsequently excluded from the government.<sup>118</sup> This marked a shift in how labor would proceed at Michelin, as there had been no major strike movements between 1944 and May 1947.<sup>119</sup>

In many ways, the June 1948 strikes picked up where the 1947 strikes left off. Following the failure of the 1947 strikes, the CGT planned a new round of militant strikes for the spring and summer of 1948.<sup>120</sup> In this context, strikes at Michelin in June 1948 gained the attention of the world. Activity at Michelin in Clermont-Ferrand gained the attention of several international newspapers including *The New York Times*, *The Times* of London, and *The Boston Globe*. On the morning of June 16, 1948, police intervened to disrupt sit-down strikers that were occupying a Bergougnan rubber factory in Clermont-Ferrand after union heads refused an offer from

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<sup>116</sup> Ross, *Workers and Communists in France*, 31.

<sup>117</sup> Ross, *Workers and Communists in France*, 31.

<sup>118</sup> Nick Hewlett, *Modern French Politics: Analysing Conflict and Consensus since 1945* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1998), 46.

<sup>119</sup> Ross, *Workers and Communists in France*, 33.

<sup>120</sup> Ross, *Workers and Communists in France*, 55.

management to increase hourly wages by two francs rather than the six francs they demanded. Upon this announcement 180 workers occupied the Michelin factory, leading to forces of the Interior Ministry and local police to intervene. After the arrival of government forces, *The New York Times* reported that the strikers “hurled bottles of sulphuric acid and tear-gas grenades at the Government forces, which replied principally with tear gas.”<sup>121</sup> *The New York Times* reported that as of June 17<sup>th</sup> 50,000 workers were joining in solidarity with the Michelin workers, and that because of CGT action the strike could very well increase to 100,000 by June 18<sup>th</sup>.<sup>122</sup> In addition to the coverage in *The New York Times*, *The Times* of London also reported on the June 16<sup>th</sup> events in Clermont-Ferrand. Their coverage added that the strike had so far led to over 100 injuries on both sides, leaving 30 policemen in danger of losing their sight because of the sulphuric acid used by the strikers.<sup>123</sup>

The language and subject matter of the initial reports in the international press illustrated not only the continued conflict with organized labor after the war but also the general fear of communism. The actions of both the strikers and the intervening forces were typical of the time period. The CGT planned for their strikes to be militant. Likewise, brutal police repression was typical. This pattern of workers’ actions and police response became clear quickly when one looks at the more extended coverage of the Michelin strike.

By the following day, the strike had spread far beyond Clermont-Ferrand and even outside of France. The June 18, 1948 *Boston Globe* reported that the original strike had now spread to include 347,000 workers in England, Belgium, and France. As the movement spread to

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<sup>121</sup> “Strikes Led by Reds Grip France After Clashes in Rubber Factories,” *The New York Times*, June 17, 1948, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/108162845?accountid=8505>.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> “French Factory Strike,” *The Times* (London), June 17, 1948, [http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=bates\\_main&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS51857105&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0](http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=bates_main&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS51857105&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0).

halt production beyond France, the fear of the rise of communism only worsened. *The Boston Globe* reported that officials feared that the strike might be the “beginning of a long-heralded Communist ‘summer offensive’ against the coalition government of Premier Robert Schuman.”<sup>124</sup> Elsewhere, strikes were stopping work as well. Amidst reports of the labor situation in France, *The Times* reported on a workers’ strike at the London docks. Over 10,000 workers had stopped work on 80 ships.<sup>125</sup> Even given their own crisis at home, strikes that began in Clermont-Ferrand spread to such a scale that gained attention across the globe. While understanding that a communist-led organization was capable of garnering such momentum while causing disruption to production, the international press demonstrated the need to prevent such activity from spreading.

While a strike of this magnitude was not limited to Michelin during this time period, the persistence of massive strikes at Michelin represented a continuation with the years prior to German occupation and demonstrated a collective fear of communism in the postwar political climate. Similar to labor movements of the late 1930s, strikes of the late 1940s brought production and services to a stop. Other than halting production at Michelin and other factories, the *New York Times* report of the strikes in Clermont-Ferrand cited that department stores did not open, local papers were not published, trains did not run, and public transit did not function as normal.<sup>126</sup> In addition to the political threat labor movement represented, they imposed serious economic costs that the postwar economy of France simply did not allow for. A report in the June 20, 1948 *New York Times* cited economic concerns ranging from military expenditures to

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<sup>124</sup> “Strikes Idle 347,000 British, French and Belgian Workers,” *The Boston Globe*, June 18, 1948, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/819738523?accountid=8505>.

<sup>125</sup> “Thousands More Idle at Docks,” *The Times* (London), June 17, 1948, [http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=bates\\_main&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS69027537&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0](http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=bates_main&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS69027537&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0).

<sup>126</sup> Michael James, “Guards Leave Struck City,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 1948, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/108161129?accountid=8505>.

possible price raises to the imposing costs of government subsidized industries.<sup>127</sup> While production was of particular importance in the context of economic recovery, the *New York Times* report illustrated that life could not continue on as normal. Akin to the strikes of the Popular Front era, the strikes that began in Clermont-Ferrand in June 1948 had implications far beyond the town itself. Labor activity at Michelin and beyond tested the economic stability of France to emerge from the war and interrupted daily life just as people were finding peace in the aftermath of war.

Above all, the attention the movement gained in Clermont-Ferrand and elsewhere demonstrated a political climate extremely hostile to the rise of communism. In this particular case, officials around the world feared the capacity of communist leadership to gain momentum and attention beginning from one isolated incident. By June 19<sup>th</sup>, *The New York Times* was reporting that security forces were leaving Clermont-Ferrand. The same article mentioned that the largest effect of the strike movement in Clermont-Ferrand was the sympathy strike at Michelin. The author noted that at Michelin, 13,500 workers had seized the Michelin plant demanding better seniority bonuses.<sup>128</sup> Even though the conflict did not begin at Michelin, workers' reaction at Michelin exhibited their connection to the larger labor movement. Discontent over seniority bonuses further revealed that labor at Michelin was not appeased and continued to voice their demands for better conditions. At Michelin and beyond, actions in support of this strike and others demonstrated the capabilities of the labor movement to disrupt actions in France and create a fear of communism around the world.

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<sup>127</sup> Lansing Warrens, "Communists Again Testing Strength of French Regime," *The New York Times*, June 20, 1948, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/108098062?accountid=8505>.

<sup>128</sup> James, "Guards Leave Struck City," *The New York Times*, June 19, 1948.

## New Communist Fears

Whereas in the interwar era communist fears expressed fears leading up to the war, in the postwar climate, the non-communist world perceived large, organized labor movements as a threat to their way of existence. In France, many of these immediate labor conflicts occurred while the Fourth Republic was not yet firmly established. Until May 1947, the three major forces of wartime resistance, the Christian democratic Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP), the Communist Party (PCF), and the Socialist party (SFIO), worked together under the banner of tripartism. Together, these forces implemented a postwar agenda focusing on nationalizing key industries, reaching full employment, and increasing benefits of the welfare state.<sup>129</sup> However, by May 1937 it had become clear that a lasting union between business and labor was not possible. Even as the Communist party was pushed aside after May 1947, the government itself was in a fragile state. Communist forces remained the primary opposition to De Gaulle's coalition government. However, now on the outside of the government, the Communists increasingly turned to strikes orchestrated by the CGT to express their position. Beyond the political situation in France, the larger concern at stake was the rise of communism in Europe.

Although Clermont-Ferrand was removed from the central government in Paris, clashes between communist and Gaullist forces reached the town. The March 15, 1948 *New York Times* reported a riot between Gaullists and Communists in Clermont-Ferrand the previous day. Communists interrupted a speech at a meeting of de Gaulle supporters in Clermont-Ferrand's main square, causing local police to eventually intervene and stop the riot.<sup>130</sup> This incident in a smaller provincial town gained attention across the world because of the conflict it represented.

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<sup>129</sup> Hewlett, *Modern French Politics*, 46.

<sup>130</sup> "Gaullists, Reds Clash: Several Hurt in Political Rioting—Police Disperse 2 Groups," *The New York Times*, March 15, 1948, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/108312041?accountid=8505>.

Throughout France, Gaullist forces were barely holding onto control. Clashes like this isolated incident in Clermont-Ferrand represented a broader interest in the political stability of France and Europe as a whole, particularly against the threat of communism.

The June 1948 strikes that began in Clermont-Ferrand and spread throughout Europe illustrated not only the remobilization of labor at Michelin but also the larger fear of communism in Europe. These strikes served to rationalize fears of communism taking hold in Europe as the international community watched this fear become a reality in Germany. Following these strikes, *The New York Times* reported how communist forces were testing the strength of the French government. The author of this report noted how remarkable it was that this situation gained strength and attention far beyond France amidst serious problems in Germany.<sup>131</sup> The situation in Germany was falling apart, leading up to the Berlin Blockade, which began June 24<sup>th</sup>. As Soviet forces limited access to the eastern zone, the threat of communism became much more tangible to the rest of the world. *The New York Times* made a point of how the combination of labor disputes and the situation in Germany was leading to a genuine fear of communism and the threat it posed to western democracies like France. While the rise of the labor movement and the situation in Berlin were not directly related to each other, the timing of event brought to the forefront fears over communism that the western world had following the war.

Although postwar fears of communism and labor movements were not the same as the ones at the end of the 1930s, both occurred in political climates where leftist forces were, in the case of the late 1930s, the governing power, and, in the case of the postwar situation, a viable threat and alternative. As France and the rest of the world watch communism take its hold in Germany, leaders feared for the future of their own countries. Because these fears were

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<sup>131</sup> Warrens, "Communists Again Testing Strength of French Regime," *The New York Times*, June 20, 1948.

materializing elsewhere in Europe, people worried that the same could happen in France. As communism was clearly at the root of the June 1948 strikes that began in Clermont-Ferrand and quickly spread, its power to interrupt daily life and to threaten social order were clear.

After reaching its climax with a one-hour general strike on June 19<sup>th</sup>, the labor movement calmed down quickly. Amidst reports contextualizing the labor disputes in Clermont-Ferrand with other threats of labor and communist power, the June 20, 1948 *New York Times* claimed that Clermont-Ferrand was finally “at peace.” The article stated that strikes in the Bergougnen, Michelin, and Dunlop rubber factories “appear to have been settled, at least temporarily, during a series of secret negotiations between the management, labor and the Government.”<sup>132</sup>

Although the report included a resolution, the nature of the resolution was fragile and temporary. As Michelin worked to ensure its postwar success through new products and increased production, labor’s support was more important than ever. Throughout the end of the 1940s and 1950s the CGT orchestrated strikes that were capable of grinding normal activities to a halt. Nearly ten years after the wide press coverage of the June 1948 strikes, *The Times* continued to report on the action of the CGT in France, and in Clermont-Ferrand. The May 28, 1958 *Times* reported on a strike organized once again by the CGT with the paralyzing effect of halting train, bus, and metro services in Paris. The article noted that in Clermont-Ferrand, strikes organized by the CGT and Christian unions had effectively stopped production at Michelin, leaving 19,000 workers in Clermont-Ferrand idle.<sup>133</sup> Ten years apart, strikes organized by the CGT remained able to disrupt daily life and continued to be recurring events in French postwar

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<sup>132</sup> “Clermont-Ferrand at Peace,” *The New York Times*, June 20, 1948, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/108108460?accountid=8505>.

<sup>133</sup> “Protest Strikes Unimpressive,” *The Times* (London), May 28, 1958, [http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=bates\\_main&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS168516284&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0](http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=bates_main&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS168516284&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0).

life. As this trajectory continued and continues today, labor relations still shape even international conversations surrounding Michelin, for it is Michelin's particular relationship with its workforce that has left a lasting impression on the firm's trajectory as well as the outside world.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Michelin's Lasting Memory**

“The deeper structures of French society did not disintegrate as a result of the Vichy crisis.”<sup>134</sup>

The deeper structures that defined life at Michelin did not disappear. A defining sense of identity remained through the Popular Front, the damages of war, and the uncertain years that followed. While Rousso's analysis clearly addressed the Vichy years in particular, at Michelin the story of continuity was much larger, speaking to a company history influenced by events of the twentieth century but withstanding the test of time.

While labor has certainly left its mark on French contemporary life, it was the war that marked the largest shift in the historical memory of past events. While the memory of war has evolved over time, the treatment of labor was influenced by the events of May 1968 when France was again debilitated by a round of strikes that captured the attention of the world in a greater way than the strikes of the Popular Front era. Writing of memory in postwar France in his famous book *The Vichy Syndrome*, Henry Rousso described the impact of May 1968 on French history when he wrote, “In May 1968 a generation noisily proclaimed its repudiation of a certain type of society and therefore, implicitly, of a certain vision of its history.”<sup>135</sup> Therefore, not only did the events of May 1968 mark a new reference point for protest and disruption in contemporary France, it also marked a cultural divide in the treatment of the memory of World War II. Aside from the memory of war, the question Rousso raised brought into consideration the memory of labor as well. In this manner, Rousso suggested that the popular memory of labor was inherently marked by the events of 1968 in more ways than the Popular Front. The larger

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<sup>134</sup> Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 305.

<sup>135</sup> Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 98.

consideration of labor and Michelin does to some extent go along with this divide; 1968 did mark a generational shift in which the new generation viewed labor not in comparison to the Popular Front but instead to 1968. Yet, while memory of the war never disappeared, the history of Michelin was more about long-term continuities and less so about the break of the war or of 1968. Therefore, even though the war and later on 1968 marked important turning points in the collective French memory, the more important story of labor and management at Michelin was the lasting trajectories that continued in spite of these shifts.

Applying academic theory on memory to one corporate history presented its challenges in that changes at one company were a much more focused lens of study than broader questions of labor and World War II. Although my research extended beyond Michelin in the contextualization of labor and events of the Second World War, the treatment of memory always came back to how it related to life at Michelin. Similar to the methods used in previous chapters, I contend here that it is possible, drawing on Rousso and others, to interrogate the memory of war, corporation, and labor at Michelin by looking at conversations in the international press. Within these snippets of life at Michelin seen in the press, it was possible to examine how such reports draw on or shy away from past history of the firm. While these press sources did not always address specific events including wartime tragedies and past conflict with labor, the more important focus was the long-term continuities at Michelin that endured amidst a rapidly changing global context.

### **A Timeline for Memory**

Before considering the treatment of memories of war and labor at Michelin, it is important to first understand the roots of memory in the time period immediately following the

war. Rousso's division of memory focused on recognizing broader time periods that categorized certain concerns or interests of their time and, for the purpose of my thesis, the timeline he established allows for a better contextualization of events surrounding Michelin since liberation. Rousso categorized four different time periods in the evolution of the trauma inflicted by the Vichy syndrome. 1944 to 1954 consisted largely of mourning. In the second phase from 1954 to 1971 Vichy became less controversial. The third period from 1971 to 1974 shattered the Gaullist myth of the whole nation as resistant. The fourth phase, which continues to the present, focuses on the question of occupation.<sup>136</sup> Contextualizing primary sources with the work of authors such as Rousso allowed to contextualize particular moments reported in the press amidst other cultural changes in treatment.

Henry Rousso categorized the period from 1944 to 1954 as one of "unfinished mourning," a decade that focused primarily on the events of Liberation and Reconstruction.<sup>137</sup> This decade was a time focused on traditional grieving, for the loss of family and friends, and coming to terms with the internal crises of political instability and economic recovery France was facing. The French people first had to deal with reconciling the behavior of the Vichy government, not to mention the question of collaboration. As France first began to grapple with these questions of grief and recovery, Charles De Gaulle exerted his own treatment of the events of the previous five years in a way that focused on commemorating, rather than remembering, World War II. In his book *Divided Memory*, Olivier Wieviorka focused on French remembrance of World War II over time. Wieviorka identified how De Gaulle strove to identify France as victorious in the conflict, distancing his own Free France from the Vichy regime, and reducing

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<sup>136</sup> Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 10.

<sup>137</sup> Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 15.

the conflict to an eternal Franco-German rivalry.<sup>138</sup> Thus, the memory of the war began to take form in the context of the top-down focus on demonstrating that France was a victorious nation.

The persistence of strikes and labor conflict during this time period from 1944 to 1954 illustrated the continued power of the Communist party to influence life in France. In the case of Michelin, and elsewhere, labor continued to be an influencing factor in the activity of the company. As much as De Gaulle represented a France that said no to German occupation, his vision for the future of France greatly differed from that of the Communist party and their remembrance of the war. Thus, as debates over the treatment of memory were beginning to take shape tension arose between the Gaullist vision of the past decade and that of the Communist party. At Michelin, the initial question of memory of the war brought into question an age-old question of labor at the firm as communist groups continued to voice their demands.

### **The Shadow of the War**

Apparent in many more ways than the memories of labor and corporate behavior is the memory of Michelin's activity during the war. The war, and its memory, influenced life at Michelin alongside the rest of France. Aside from the collective memory Rousso discussed in its application to France as a whole, there is the particularity of the war at Michelin that encompassed both collaboration and resistance. This specific memory of what happened at Michelin during the war has had a lasting impact in how it related to patterns of behavior that have continued long after the war.

As Michelin's behavior during the war encompassed both collaboration and resistance, they are two separate entities to remember. While it was easier to talk about how its resistance

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<sup>138</sup> Olivier Wieviorka, *Divided Memory: French Recollections of World War II from the Liberation to the Present*, trans. George Holoch (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 11.

activity was remembered, the memory of its collaboration was not as obvious. Immediately after the war, Michelin was not identified as a collaborator. Writing in *Michelin Men*, Herbert Lottman commented that in his own research, there was no archival evidence suggesting there was a case to be made against Michelin management for their collaboration during the war.<sup>139</sup> Considering Michelin as a collaborator with the Germans, much of the rhetoric surrounding this topic focused on how their production for the Germans saved lives. Writing about Michelin after the war, Christian Lamy noted in his article “Autour de Michelin: Mémoires” that after the war it was part of the collective memory in Clermont-Ferrand that employment at Michelin saved people from departure to Germany.<sup>140</sup> This attitude towards Michelin’s collaboration with the Reich has continued over time. Thinking about the postwar memory of Michelin’s collaboration during the war, it was largely accepted that Michelin’s collaboration allowed them to carry out resistance activities and prevented countless workers from having to fulfill forced labor service in Germany.

Largely speaking, Michelin’s resistance activity was part of the conversation when highlighting the firm’s history. As the conversation sometimes recognized their collaboration, it focused more on how Michelin resisted. One way these memories were discussed was allegations of sabotaging products destined for Germany. One such claim was that factory workers fabricated rubber that purposely did not hold at low temperatures.<sup>141</sup> While the claims about sabotage remain disputed, other resistance activities of Michelin employees were widely recognized. Marcel, the family member who died in a German camp was recognized as a resistance leader soon after the end of the war, and other accounts of Michelin detailed the involvement of various family members. Another allegation was that Michelin was frequently

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<sup>139</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 191.

<sup>140</sup> Lamy, “Autour de Michelin: Mémoires,” 294.

<sup>141</sup> Lionel Dumond, “Le Défi technique,” 27.

either late or behind on production.<sup>142</sup> While the press recognized and applauded Michelin for these activities, the memory of these activities was more consistent than other aspects of occupation. Even though many discussions of Michelin's resistance activity during the war celebrated the firm for what they were able to do in the face of German occupation, they were also often critiqued later on for continuing the same behaviors. While the sense of secrecy and paternalism surrounding the firm were seen as good things during the war, they were the very behaviors the corporation drew criticism for later on.

### **Labor's Persistence**

On one hand, as labor struggles continued to be a defining factor of the Michelin corporation, the continuation of these issues made it less apparent that discussion of the company would address their past history with labor conflict. On the other hand, the lack of such conversations did not mean that the past was not important. Rather, the visibility of long-term continuities vis-à-vis labor demonstrated a sense of permanence in Michelin's corporate behavior and their relationship with labor. As labor disruptions served as a point of continuity in the understanding of life in postwar France, strikes remained a focal point of the international press for discussing Michelin. In the aftermath of 1968, France had a new point of reference in its collective memory of labor. Therefore, as the outside looked to the question of labor at Michelin in the years following 1968, their perspective was more marked by the more recent events rather than past events which Michelin had had a more central role in.

Due to the continued strength of labor, seen primarily through the Communist party and the local influence of the CGT, Michelin continued to face the influence of labor in ways similar

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<sup>142</sup> John F. Sweets, "The Resistance in Clermont-Ferrand and in Auvergne," in *Unrecognized Resistance: The Franco-American Experience in World War Two*, ed. François-Georges Dreyfus, trans. Paul Seaton (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 61.

to how it had in the late 1930s as well as after the war. Different instances discussing actions of labor at Michelin illustrated how organized labor continued to be part of the conversation, however in ways that differed from the past. A first notable difference was that the role of national labor organizations was not as present as it was leading up to the war and in the years immediately afterwards. Even in discussion of strikes and other union conflicts the role of the CGT or specific labor organizations was not discussed. An account in the October 15, 1973 *New York Times* discussed Michelin's plans to examine plans for the modernization of its plants with unions. Although the report addressed unions in both France and Italy, it did not mention specific union names or goals.<sup>143</sup> Whereas reports of the late 1930s or late 1940s discussed the actions of the CGT at Michelin in relation to other organized strike efforts, this sort of recollection was no longer the case. Ross argued that from 1947 onwards, workers and the organizations that represented them were excluded from conversations about modernization.<sup>144</sup> As they were left voiceless in the government, strikes remained their only means of voicing an opinion. That was not to say though that the CGT and the PCF were no longer influential in French life. Rather, the strikes of May and June 1968 confirmed once again the direction of the CGT. Writing on the perspective of both the PCF and the CGT post-1968, George Ross argued that "the events of 1968 were experienced as confirmation of the correctness of strategic directions set out earlier."<sup>145</sup> In this way, the success of labor in 1968 continued and intensified the ways in which labor continued to influence life in France. Although the immediate aftermath of the Popular Front was often remembered as a legacy of disappointment and failure, the persistence of labor in moments like 1968 spoke to a long-term continuity in French life. In this

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<sup>143</sup> "Secretive Michelin to Discuss its Plans with Unions: Movement is International," *The New York Times*, October 15, 1973, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/119601498?accountid=8505>.

<sup>144</sup> Ross, *Workers and Communists in France*, 216.

<sup>145</sup> Ross, *Workers and Communists in France*, 215.

way, May 1968 built upon and intensified this continuity at Michelin and elsewhere. Whereas 1968 represented a new moment for remembering the war, for the history of labor it solidified organizational success of the CGT.

While the organization and memory of labor inevitably drew upon past labor movements, the discussion of labor in the moment did not seem to focus on past events at all. This makes a degree of sense given the needs of the postwar world. Michelin, alongside the rest of Europe, moved towards a more centralized and integrated economy in the years following World War II. The implications of labor disruptions at Michelin spread far beyond Clermont-Ferrand. In the years following the war, Michelin alongside the rest of the world moved towards a more centralized way of doing business in three different ways—inside France itself, within the European community, and in the context of globalization. While all three impacted how Michelin operated, the story of globalization is most important to Michelin in the context of this thesis. Within France this story of globalization was about France asserting its place in the global economy. At Michelin, it was about their continued operations elsewhere in Europe and their expansion across the globe.

In October 1972, *The Times* detailed labor disputes at Michelin that began in Clermont-Ferrand and spread throughout Europe. The report illustrated how unrest for Michelin throughout Europe began two weeks prior in Clermont-Ferrand when 130 workers at the wire-gauze workshop protested management's instructions for increased production.<sup>146</sup> While this report did not blame the initial causes of the strike on one group or union, as was the case in both the prewar and immediate postwar periods, it does represent a continuity in the ability of one

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<sup>146</sup> "Michelin Faces Labour Unrest All Over Europe," *The Times* (London), October 10, 1972, [http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=bates\\_main&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS320960330&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0](http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=bates_main&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS320960330&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0).



small group of workers, formally organized or not, to have profound repercussions far beyond Clermont-Ferrand. In France and beyond, the attention of the international press continued to turn to labor disputes at Michelin, particularly when workers bonded together to bring production to a halt. A report of *The New York Times* in July 1983 detailed the actions of a Michelin factory strike in Stroke-on-Trent, England. Thatcher had just won the general election in a landslide victory the month prior, reinforcing the strength of the Conservative Party. The article reported on two issues concerning the Stroke-on-Trent factory. First, it included an announcement made by Michelin the day prior that they had laid off 2000 workers. Additionally, the article stated that production at the factory had been halted because of a strike 1000 workers strong over a new proposal of weekend work.<sup>147</sup> This report illustrated not only the fragile state of labor in the UK, but also how the stability of labor was a concern for the increasingly globalized industrial world. While removed from both the activity of Michelin in France and in North America, this instance in England reported on in North America revealed how questions of labor disruptions in Europe and across the globe were of interest to an increasingly international audience. In the context of global recession in the early 1980s, labor unrest at Michelin impacted not only Michelin's operations elsewhere but also the global economy as a whole.

As Michelin continued to expand overseas, they remained troubled by corporate relationships with labor. One way this continuity came to the forefront was in the opening of a new factory in Greenville, South Carolina in 1975. At this new South Carolina factory Michelin worked hard to counter its image of a corporation plagued by labor disputes. As they established this new operation in North America, a *New York Times* report illustrated that, as in Europe, Michelin tried to prevent labor organization. The article discussed how the United Rubber

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<sup>147</sup> "Michelin Acts in Strike," *The New York Times*, July 12, 1983, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/122145041?accountid=8505>.

Workers Union would like to unionize Michelin as well. It quoted Yves Trelieu, executive vice president of the Michelin Tire Corporation, saying that, “The only companies that get unionized are those that deserve it.”<sup>148</sup> Quoting a Michelin executive making such a statement suggested that Michelin did not believe it merited the disruption associated with labor organization. Furthermore, Mr. Trelieu’s statement implied that Michelin did not wish to recreate in North America the same difficulties it had faced with unions in Europe. In addition to the general decline of the labor in the United States after the 1950s, strikes in the United States were losing their effectiveness as companies increasingly threatened to shut the factory down or to move to a new location with lower labor costs.<sup>149</sup> Even in a new context, in this instance the United States, focus on Michelin drew upon a publicized history of labor at the firm.

### **Corporate Continuities**

As Michelin evolved over the second half of the twentieth century, it maintained an identity that was both remarkably similar to its origins as a family manufacturing business and characterized by its relationship with labor. In looking at discussion of the corporate behavior of Michelin after the war, two continuities come to light—the firm’s sense of secrecy vis-à-vis the outside world and its paternalism. While the company has faced many external pressures over its 125-plus years, the lasting presence of these two corporate behaviors speak to a persistent corporate identity.

Corporate criticism of Michelin for being secretive stems from their actions during the war and immediately after, and is in many ways a contradictory source of critique. Although Michelin delivered rubber products to the Germans throughout the war, they were notoriously

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<sup>148</sup> “Companies that Get Unionized Deserve it,” *The New York Times*, January 29, 1978, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/123834320?accountid=8505>.

<sup>149</sup> Carter A. Wilson, *Public Policy: Continuity and Change* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 256-257.

secretive in their actions. Allegedly Michelin never allowed German authorities to enter their factory.<sup>150</sup> This hidden behavior at Michelin did not only apply to the Germans. It spoke to concerted efforts on Michelin's behalf to keep their operations a secret to all those on the outside, even the head of the French government. When Charles de Gaulle made an official visit to Clermont-Ferrand on June 30, 1945 he was kept outside the factory gates.<sup>151</sup> Years later, an executive commented on de Gaulle's visit saying, "No one visits our plants."<sup>152</sup> While Michelin's secrecy has been a continued source of criticism, it once again draws upon corporate behavior that allowed for the survival of many during the war, yet seemingly had no place in an evolving corporate landscape.

Specifically, bringing into question Michelin's secrecy questioned the company's ability to modernize and be a player in an evolving economy, in the case of Europe, a more centralized European economy. One report from the *New York Times* in October 1972 questioned Michelin's lasting corporate behavior in light of movements towards a more centralized European economy. The article described Michelin as "the secretive, technically brilliant, paternalistic French enterprise."<sup>153</sup> Specifically, the article contextualized actions of Michelin amidst changes taking place in Europe before the entry of Great Britain into the European Common market the coming January. This report recognized Michelin's past behavior as secretive and paternalistic, terms that gave an impression of a company having difficulties modernizing. Above all, this report recognized Michelin's past history as a secretive company, however it did not state specific instances of this behavior such as their activity during the war.

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<sup>150</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 187.

<sup>151</sup> Lottman, *Michelin Men*, 191.

<sup>152</sup> Henry Scott-Stokes, "Michelin Quietly Bets a Billion," *The New York Times*, January 29, 1978, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/123832506?accountid=8505>.

<sup>153</sup> Clyde H. Farnsworth, "Michelin Fights Back," *The New York Times*, October 8, 1972, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/119523461?accountid=8505>.

Other reports questioned Michelin's secretive behavior affecting their ability to modernize. One article reported that Michelin had finally agreed to sit down with union leadership in an article titled "Secretive Michelin to Discuss its Plans with Unions." The article disclosed information about Michelin in a way that again questioned their ability to work with labor to modernize their operations, in this specific instance modernizing operations in Italy.<sup>154</sup> As such reports questioned Michelin's longevity because of their secrecy, it was ironic because it was the same activity that allowed for their survival during the war.

A *New York Times* report on Michelin and its influence in Clermont-Ferrand detailed one worker, Albert Pissis, and his relationship with his employer. Mr. Pissis, the article's chosen example of an average worker, was never part of a union.<sup>155</sup> Details of Mr. Pissis's life illustrated the continued paternalism of Michelin in Clermont-Ferrand. The article claimed that he has never joined a union because "Michelin frowns on such activities." He lived in housing built by Michelin.<sup>156</sup> While this article did not have anything particularly negative to say about Michelin, the picture it painted of the company was one rooted in a past, paternalistic vision. To sum up his life, Mr. Pissis stated that his life revolves around "telly, bistro, dodo [the French vernacular for sleep] and Michelin."<sup>157</sup> Above all, this glimpse of life at Michelin suggested that they were stuck in the past, even given their role in the postwar economic prosperity of France. As the article gave the impression that this employee's entire life was Michelin, it led the reader to believe that Michelin's corporate practices correlated with those of a bygone era, behavior that had no place at the modern multinational corporation Michelin is claiming to be. As the author did not include discussion of labor at Michelin, it differed from many other glimpses into life at

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<sup>154</sup> "Secretive Michelin to Discuss its Plans with Unions," *The New York Times*, October 15, 1973.

<sup>155</sup> Farnsworth, "Michelin and a City in France," *The New York Times*, June 11, 1972.

<sup>156</sup> Farnsworth, "Michelin and a City in France," *The New York Times*, June 11, 1972.

<sup>157</sup> Farnsworth, "Michelin and a City in France," *The New York Times*, June 11, 1972.

Michelin. In this way, the article was carefully constructed to reinforce management's vehement opposition to labor organization. While this narrative of life at Michelin did not draw upon past a history of of organized labor at the company, it did speak to how Michelin had long frowned upon labor organization.

Even though paternalism at Michelin often evoked negative connotations, Michelin continued to implement paternalistic programs for its employees in their overseas operations. When Michelin opened their South Carolina factory in 1975 they brought with them many corporate practices long associated with their firm. A few years after opening, a *New York Times* article compared the relationship between labor and management at Michelin to other employers in the region. The article clearly presented Michelin's goal of avoiding union organization at their Greenville, South Carolina factory. The report detailed "fringe benefits" awarded to Michelin workers which included discounted work shoes, inexpensive tires, and a pharmacy card which awarded a discount on medication. Additionally, Michelin implemented an activity association for its employees which sought to encourage "leisure-time activities" such as fishing, tennis, hiking, camping, and even cooking lessons.<sup>158</sup> The benefits awarded to Michelin employees in Greenville was a clear continuity of the social programs the company established in France at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Clermont-Ferrand, Michelin provided discounted housing and material goods to workers and their families. Beyond these benefits, there was another comparison to be made with the discounted tires available for employees in Greenville, specifically in comparison to Michelin's activity during the war. Throughout the war, workers at Michelin benefitted from a certain level of protections not available elsewhere. One benefit was that Michelin gave out tires to its workers in Clermont-Ferrand, which allowed

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<sup>158</sup> "Companies that Get Unionized Deserve it," *The New York Times*, January 29, 1978.

them to trade the valuable tires on the black market.<sup>159</sup> In this regard, Michelin's operations in Greenville spoke to their continuity even in the context of global expansion. In this way, Michelin continued to apply their own brand of paternalism even as they grew and evolved.

All of these "fringe benefits" are a clear echo of benefits awarded to workers in Clermont-Ferrand before the war. While Michelin directors of the late 1930s were clearly shocked by union activity at their firm as they thought they had avoided such organization through their social programs, moving forward social programs remained an incentive to prevent workers from unionizing. In terms of Michelin's North American operations in South Carolina, it was much more difficult for workers to unionize in southern states due to state legislation unfavorable to unions.<sup>160</sup> While this paternalistic practice was more out of place by the 1970s, it remained engrained in Michelin company culture, for better or for worse. In their continued critique and expansion overseas, paternalism remained an important part of Michelin's identity throughout the twentieth century. While the practice brought into question the firm's ability to modernize, it also revealed a defining characteristic of the firm that was central to its relationship with labor. In many ways, it is unclear how labor reacted to the paternalism Michelin imposed on its workers. It is clear, however, that labor remained fueled to act in spite of the protections Michelin thought it was providing.

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<sup>159</sup> Lamy, "Autour de Michelin: Mémoires," 297.

<sup>160</sup> Jeff Bennett, "Tire Makers' New Home," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 16, 2012, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1000437055?accountid=8505>.

## Conclusion

Michelin's lasting presence from its modest family origins in the early nineteenth century to the industrial giant it is known as today highlights the relative strength of the firm. Viewed alongside the tragedies and disruptions France experienced in early to mid twentieth century, Michelin's endurance acknowledges its special place in contemporary French life. In moments when French life has been ripped apart at the seams, Michelin has withstood social, political, and economic threats to its very existence. In this way, Michelin occupies a special place in contemporary French history. While political moments have come to pass and labor moments have come to be viewed as products of their time, Michelin has stood resolutely.

While the focus of my thesis and its interest in French corporate and labor history has looked specifically Michelin, the story of French corporations and labor in the twentieth century is much larger. Based off of the little I know, there are comparisons to be made between Michelin and Renault in their relationships with labor, manufacturing, and collaboration during the war. Additionally, the family focus of Michelin brings to mind the corporate structure of L'Oréal. My point here is that the particularities of French corporate and labor history for the time period I examined in this thesis are not limited to Michelin.

When studying Michelin, their labor, and the global economy, it is important to note that, although the company's paternalism endured in France and overseas, it did not silence labor. The relationship between labor and management at Michelin demonstrates defining characteristics of the firm which, although engrained in past recollections of Michelin, have continued to define the company into the present. One can see the clear continuities of both

labor and management in Michelin's development of its own brand of paternalism and in labor's frequent refusal.

As we have seen since the 1930s, Michelin's paternalistic identity has continued to raise questions of its ability to modernize, particularly in the context of the increasingly connected global economy. One can see this continued critique in a May 2001 article in the *Wall Street Journal* that discusses recent efforts to modernize and the leadership of a new Michelin family member at the firm. The article begins by stating that "When Édouard Michelin took the wheel at his family's tire business in June 1999, he may have underestimated what it would take to shake up the secretive, tradition-bound company."<sup>161</sup> This perception of Michelin draws upon an understanding of Michelin as a paternalistic company, using this adjective as a way of questioning the company's ability to move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Just as past discussions of Michelin's actions have criticized the long-term direction of the firm, this article from 2001 continues that understanding of life at Michelin, suggesting that the corporation must change to be a player in the modern world.

Aside from its continued critique, the article does contain a kernel of hope, however. The author states that Michelin has recently opened its doors to analysts so that shareholders can have a better understanding of what Michelin really is.<sup>162</sup> As Michelin has long prioritized its privacy, this opening to the outside world is a possible sign of change for the firm. Increased transparency in Michelin's operations signals the firm moving away from the closed sense of paternalism that has long-defined the manufacturer. A sign perhaps that its attitude towards warding off organized labor is changing. Moreover, Michelin is no longer a family business.

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<sup>161</sup> David Woodruff, "Michelin Hits Some Bumps as it Modernizes—Efforts Show Struggles as Old Firms Adopt to Practices of Today," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 15, 2001, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/398844322?accountid=8505>.

<sup>162</sup> Woodruff, "Michelin Hits Some Bumps as it Modernizes," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 15, 2001.



Jean-Dominique Senard, Michelin's CEO since May 2012 is the first chief executive of the firm that is in no way related to the Michelin family. While his leadership of the company inherently represents a shift from the past, it is seen in many ways as a positive one for the firm. In an interview with *Les Echos*, the French financial newspaper, Senard assured the public that just because he is not part of the Michelin family does not mean that he does not share the same values as the firm. Just as innovation at the firm has allowed it to thrive in trying times such as the economic recovery with their invention of the radial tire, Senard views innovation at the firm as a characteristic that will continue to carry Michelin forward.<sup>163</sup>

Beyond the survival of the company itself, the lasting impression of labor conflict at Michelin addresses not only the situation of labor in the twentieth century, but also to labor's relationship to management. As labor moments dissolved, the question of labor at Michelin remained. In the continuities that developed in labor and management's ongoing struggle at Michelin, the relationship between the two solidified its importance in the larger understanding of labor at this time. Labor at Michelin not only connects to the broader context of labor movements in the twentieth century but also its relationship with the corporations it works for in the particularities of Michelin's long history with labor and its own brand of paternalism.

For France, it is difficult to consider any history that spans the course of the twentieth century without addressing the question of the war. At Michelin, the war was a point of interruption in the long-term battle between management and labor as well as a moment in which paternalistic behavior continued in spite of outside pressures. Michelin during the war addresses the larger picture of France and the war as the family both experienced tragedy on a deeply personal level and grappled with having been associated with a fascist regime. For Michelin's

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<sup>163</sup> Ingrid François-Feurstein and David Barroux, "Jean-Dominique Senard (Michelin): 'Il faut refondre notre dialogue social'," *Les Echos*, May 14, 2012, [http://www.lesechos.fr/14/05/2012/lesechos.fr/0202058028966\\_jean-dominique-senard--michelin-----il-faut-refondre-notre-dialogue-social-.htm](http://www.lesechos.fr/14/05/2012/lesechos.fr/0202058028966_jean-dominique-senard--michelin-----il-faut-refondre-notre-dialogue-social-.htm).

lasting history of paternalism, the wartime years reinforced Michelin's own paternalism as an important characteristic of the firm that would continue in the years to come.

In spite of its origins in a provincial French manufacturing town, Michelin has grown to become a well-recognized global entity. In this way, its actions have lasting implications to the larger global context. How companies expand abroad, how they implement practices from back home, and how their operations relate to one another are all concerns addressed by the story of labor and Michelin. As Michelin, and the world, moved towards a more centralized way of doing business, labor's role remained more important than ever.

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