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COLLABORATION AND PACIFISM
IN FRANCE DURING WORLD WAR I

French pacifism during World War 1 was a complex and dramatic movement. One of its central leaders was Alphonse Merrheim, secretary of the Federation of Metal Workers. To his contemporaries, Merrheim stood out as a bold figure, a committed revolutionary; his active pacifism pitted him against the sentiments of an embattled and occupied France. Almost singlehandedly, he issued a pacifist journal, »L'Union des Métaux«, organized antiwar meetings, participated in the formation of pacifist committees, secretly attended an international pacifist conference, and openly criticised the French war aims. He even chided his government for bad military planning and praised the Germans for bringing industrial efficiency to conquered territories. So unpopular was Merrheim's pacifism that he walked the streets with two large dogs for protection, sometimes changed his residence, frequently used a pseudonym, and always lived in fear of arrest. In fact, he was followed by the police and had his mail opened by the government.

Merrheim also battled publically with Léon Jouhaux, his friend and the secretary-general of the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (C.G.T.), because the latter, along with other syndicalists, had joined a government of national defense against the German invasion. The C.G.T. also suspended its congresses during the war, declaring, in effect, a moratorium on its attacks against the government. To Merrheim this constituted a striking violation of two cardinal principles of revolutionary syndicalism, that is, political neutrality and antimilitarism. Such action was all the more reprehensible for its end: the defense of the middle class state. Merrheim also attacked Jouhaux's identification with the Allied war attitudes: that Germany was primarily responsible for the war, that only an Allied victory could insure a just peace, and that a workers' congress should meet only after the Allied nations had defeated the Central Powers. Merrheim published articles and brochures against Jouhaux, attacked him at union meetings, in committees, and, in general, hounded him to abandon his collaboration. His hostility towards his former friend seemed almost irrevocable.

Yet during the war Merrheim, in order to protect union labor, quietly

and tacitly assisted in the government's war efforts. Although Merrheim's contact with the government was no secret – syndicalists knew to whom to turn for an official concession – its full meaning and extent was unknown, and its implications for his future conduct was grasped neither by contemporaries nor by historians. But this aspect of Merrheim's war time activities is in fact central to his political personality because it demonstrates that his concern for the material well-being of his rank-and-file and these institutions ranked above his commitment to social revolution. Moreover, important limits circumscribed all Merrheim's actions and indicate clearly that he was no revolutionary, that his pacifism posed little danger to the French war effort, and that his hostility towards Jouhaux, although real, was calculated to restore unity to the C.G.T. A close examination of his war time affairs, therefore, will not only illuminate hitherto unknown aspects of French pacifism and provide a new framework for already established facts, it will make more comprehensible why Merrheim, a seemingly committed revolutionary, failed even to respond to the revolutionary aspirations of his own metal workers during and after the war. This is linked to a fundamental fact for the history of modern France, namely that Merrheim's failure to provide leadership in the insurgent strike movements of his own men helped spare the country severe social and political dislocation in this period.

Merrheim and the Pacifist Movement: The Background

The C.G.T. prepared its members for antiwar activities, especially since the turn of the century when diplomatic tensions and clashes among the major powers had become increasingly serious. In 1900, it established the *Sou du Soldat*, an institution for the propagation of revolutionary syndicalism among workers in the army.¹ The C.G.T.'s Congress of Paris (1900) proposed that all standing armies be abolished.² Meeting against the background of the Russo-Japanese War, the Congress of Bourges (1904) hoped that all governments would scrap permanent armaments.³ By 1906, the C.G.T., meeting at Amiens, *affirms that antimilitarist and anti-patriotic propaganda must become ever more intense and ever more audacious.*⁴ The 1908 Congress of Marseille saw the C.G.T. pass its defi-

¹ See: *La Confédération Générale du Travail et le Mouvement Syndical*, Paris 1925, pp. 74–75.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Confédération Générale du Travail, XIVe Congrès National Corporatif, Bourges 1904*, p. 231.

⁴ *Confédération Générale du Travail, XVe Congrès National Corporatif, Amiens 1906*, p. 175.

nitive statement on war, proclaiming that *workers will respond to a declaration of war with a declaration of the revolutionary general strike*.⁵ In 1910, the Congress of Toulouse reaffirmed the Marseille resolution.⁶ After the German gunboat Panther sailed into Agadir Harbor, French and German syndicalists demonstrated together in Berlin for peace in July 28, 1911; on August 4th antiwar demonstrations took place in Paris with German, English, Spanish, Dutch, and French syndicalists participating. Such impressive antiwar displays convinced the C.G.T. and even the government that the labor confederation was a significant antimilitarist force.^{6a} On October 1, 1911, an extraordinary conference of the C.G.T. declared it would call a general strike to prevent war and directed its member unions to prepare to implement this resolution.⁷ Virtually up to the eve of August, 1914, the C.G.T. proclaimed its resolve to meet any war with a general strike.⁸

Merrheim too was equally antimilitaristic. He was born in 1871 in a working class milieu near Lille. His father trained him as a coppersmith and very early in his working career he became involved in the workers' movement in the Nord, first as a guesdist socialist then as a revolutionary syndicalist. By 1904 he had become secretary of the Federation of Metal Workers, a post that brought him to Paris where the union had its headquarters. This job would also make him an influential member of the C.G.T.'s governing body, the *Comité Confédéral* (Executive Committee).

Like so many syndicalists Merrheim resented the army because it attempted to inculcate patriotism in working class children, forced them to defend the liberal capitalist state, and frequently broke up strikes as well. In 1900, he suggested a program to keep alive the class consciousness of drafted workers.⁹ Later he demanded that the Minister of War permit drafted workers to attend meetings of the *Bourse du Travail*, since the Ministry permitted soldiers to attend gatherings of *the Catholic Circles*.¹⁰

⁵ Confédération Générale du Travail, XVIIe Congrès National Corporatif, Marseille 1909, p. 213.

⁶ Confédération Générale du Travail, XVIIe Congrès National Corporatif, Toulouse 1911, p. 313.

^{6a} For the topic of antimilitarism and workers and their relationship to the European governments on the eve of the first World War, see Georges HAUPT, *Socialism and the Great War: The Collapse of the Second International*, Oxford 1972.

⁷ Conférence extraordinaire spéciale des Bourses du Travail, Unions et Fédérations, tenue le 1er octobre 1911, Maison des Fédérations, Paris n. d. 1911, p. 23.

⁸ For a discussion of antimilitarism and the workers in France before World War 1, see Jean-Jacques BECKER, *Le Carnet B*, Paris 1973.

⁹ Roubaix-Tourcoing-Syndicat des chaudronniers sur cuivre, Procès-verbaux des réunions des 1er et 8 juillet 1900, des deux sections, in: *Le Cuivre*, no. 84, August 1901, p. 2.

¹⁰ (Alphonse) Merrheim, »L'Égalité!«, *Le Cuivre*, no. 96, August 1902, p. 3.

In a capitalist society *Workers do not have a country*, he said, and therefore should not be patriotic.¹¹ And it was Merrheim who sponsored the antimilitarist resolution of the Congress of Marseille.¹² Shortly thereafter, Merrheim saw more clearly than most syndicalists that war was shaping up among the European powers. In 1909 and in 1911, Merrheim studied the European arms race and military budgets, and predicted that England and Germany would fight each other, dragging the other European nations into a general war.¹³ *We find ourselves on the eve of a gigantic European conflict. Nations are marching with great steps; they are preparing themselves (for war) feverishly*, he wrote.¹⁴ For him and the workers the choice was simple: *Rather insurrection than war! Rather the general strike as a reply to a decree of mobilization.*¹⁵

The Pacifist Movement

When war did break out in August, 1914, however, neither Merrheim nor the C.G.T. took any action to protest it. Even more surprising was that leaders of the Socialist Party (SFIO), equally antimilitaristic, and the C.G.T. joined the government in a *union sacrée* for national defense against the German attack. On August 4th, the socialist group in the Chamber of Deputies unanimously voted for war credits. On August 26, the socialists Jules Guesde and Marcel Sembat entered the government. When German troops threatened Paris Jouhaux announced on September 3rd that he too would join the government, which had recently left Paris for Bordeaux. Other important syndicalists – Griffueles, Lefevre, Vignaud, Lorient, Bled – also went to Bordeaux.¹⁶ Very important in this shift was

¹¹ Alphonse Merrheim in: *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, no. 166–167, November 1 and 15, 1905, pp. 328–331.

¹² Confédération Générale du Travail, XVI^e Congrès National Corporatif, p. 213.

¹³ See Alphonse MERRHEIM, »Tout pour la Mort. Rien pour la Vie!«, *La Voix du Peuple* no. 466, August 29–September 5, 1909, pp. 1–2, and two more articles by MERRHEIM on the same theme in: *La Voix du Peuple*, no. 469, September 19–26, 1909, p. 2, and no. 472, October 10–17, 1909, p. 2; see also Alphonse MERRHEIM, »L'Approche de la Guerre«, in *La Vie Ouvrière*, no. 31, January 5, 1911, pt. I, pp. 1–17; no. 32, January 20, 1911, pt. II, pp. 101–113; no. 33, February 5, 1911, pt. III, pp. 129–141; no. 34, February 20, 1911, pt. IV, pp. 242–248; finally, see Edouard DOLLEANS, *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier*, Paris 1957, Vol. II, pp. 184–188.

¹⁴ Alphonse MERRHEIM, »L'Approche de la Guerre«, *La Vie Ouvrière*, no. 31, January 5, 1911, pt. I, p. 1.

¹⁵ Alphonse MERRHEIM, »L'Approche de la Guerre«, *La Vie Ouvrière*, no. 34, February 20, 1911, pt. IV, p. 243.

¹⁶ The shifts in the C.G.T.'s antimilitarist policy in the week before the war broke out are well-known and are covered in detail in Alfred ROSMER, *Le Mouvement Ouvrier Pendant La Guerre*, Vol. 1, Paris 1936, pp. 92–208. See also Georges LEFRANC, *Le Mouvement Syndical Sous la Troisième République*, Paris 1967, pp. 187–198.

that these men feared government repression and their possible arrest, that many had ceased being real revolutionaries but that also a Jacobin tradition impelled them to defend their country against its ancient enemy, Germany.¹⁷ The rank-and-file seemed to agree.

There was no possibility of a general strike now, but another group of syndicalists began to gather at the offices of Pierre Monatte's syndicalist weekly, »La Vie Ouvrière«, to begin a pacifist action. These were people for whom the revolutionary syndicalist principles still had meaning. Merrheim joined this group which originally consisted of Alfred Rosmer, Monatte, Henri Guilbeaux, Marcel Martinet, Amedee Deunois, Daniel Renoult, and Martov, the Russian socialists. Later Trotsky too joined. A public signal of sorts was sounded the month before when Romain Rolland, the novelist, writing from Switzerland, openly attacked the war, an *octopus that is sucking the best blood of Europe*.¹⁸ His call encouraged the small band of French pacifists.

Well into the first year of the war, however, few in France knew about any pacifist efforts. Frenchmen between 20 and 45, including revolutionary syndicalists, were being drafted; thousands were being killed or wounded daily. Prospects for a quick victory disappeared after the first six weeks of fighting, as the soldiers on the western front settled into the trenches for the duration. Merrheim decided to publicize his pacifism, thereby risking the ire of the government. He had to ease his conscience, however, which no longer permitted him to remain silent. He also hoped to enlist a wider audience for pacifism as well as to encourage peace efforts in Germany under Liebknecht. He announced to his federation he would prepare for May 1, 1915 a special antiwar issue of »L'Union des Métaux«, the federation's journal.¹⁹ He worked secretly with his friend Alfred Rosmer to get the edition out.²⁰ Together, they wrote the articles, arranged the printing, did the proof-reading, and planned the distribution of 15 000 copies of the paper. Merrheim wrote the lead article, »Notre Attitude. Notre Pensée«. In it he attacked the French insistence on an Allied victory as a prerequisite for peace. He denounced the syndicalists who cooperated with the government and insisted his federation would

¹⁷ Also useful for the dramatic events immediately proceeding the outbreak of the war see, Maurice LABI, *La Grande Division Des Travailleurs, 1914-1921*, Paris 1964, pp. 33 ff.

¹⁸ Quoted by Robert WOHL, *French Communism in the Making*, Stanford 1966, p. 59. See also Annie KRIEGL, *Aux Origines du Communisme Français*, Paris 1964, Vo. I, pp. 82-83.

¹⁹ Fédération des Métaux, Procès-verbaux, Séance de la Commission Exécutive du 17 Avril 1915. (French Institute for Social History, Paris).

²⁰ For this issue see *L'Union des Métaux*, 24-25 année, no. 61, August 1914-May 1915.

remain independent to be able thereby to influence a just peace. He suggested *not a militarist peace with forced annexations, not a peace with imperialist conquest, but a peace based upon the following principles: no annexations; political and economic independence for all nations; disarmament; obligatory arbitration (of international disputes). This is enough!*, he concluded, *This war is not our war.*

The government and even former friends criticised Merrheim when the journal appeared.²¹ A rumor spread that the government would now arrest him.²² Albert Thomas, Under Secretary of State for Munitions and Merrheim's friend, warned him to be prudent since government ministers were now talking about him. Merrheim answered that he hoped his actions would spark a German pacifist movement.²³ He would continue his peace efforts, he said, not waiting for a *convenient* moment for pacifism because too many workers were dying. *I am and remain more decided than ever for the continuation and intensification of an action in favor of peace . . .*²⁴ He meant what he said and was currently arranging antiwar meetings in Lyon and St. Nazaire.²⁵

However, Merrheim's pacifism had significant boundaries beyond which it would not go and this was first revealed at a secret international socialist conference he attended in Zimmerwald, Switzerland, in September 5–8, 1915. The origin of the conference lay in the failure of the Second International to agitate against the war as its resolutions suggested it should. Officially, the Zimmerwald Conference²⁶ met to reestablish international relations among socialists, especially those of the belligerent nations, and to begin an antiwar action. Lenin, a delegate there, wanted more, as he made quite clear to Merrheim before the conference began. No sooner had Merrheim arrived in Switzerland than Russian socialists whisked him away from the train station to meet Lenin at the *Maison du Peuple* in Berne. There, for eight hours, Lenin tried to convince Merrheim of two theses: (1) the Conference of Zimmerwald should break with the Second International and establish a new, revolutionary Third International; and (2) the Zimmerwald Conference should call for an

²¹ »Pour la Fédération du Bâtiment«, L'Union des Métaux, no. 62, May–December 1915, p. 21.

²² Archives Nationales (A.N.), F7, 13574, note of May 7, 1915, M/9784.

²³ Fédération des Métaux, Procès-verbaux, Séance de la Commission Exécutive du 5 juin (1915).

²⁴ *ibid.*, Séance de la Commission Exécutive de Samedi le 19 juin 1915.

²⁵ See A.N., F7, 13272, telegram of May 1, 1915 (# 19051/49472); A.N., F7, 13272, »Rapport« of Lyon, May 3, 1915; A.N., F7, 13574, note of May 10, 1915, M/9789; and

²⁶ I do not intend a systematic study here of the Zimmerwald movement; I am only interested in seeing it as an illustration of Merrheim's position. For a fuller treatment of Zimmerwald, see KRIEGER, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 97–142.

immediate general strike of the masses and soldiers against the war.²⁷ At the conference, Lenin sought to guide discussions by submitting a draft manifesto and a draft resolution, each containing his position.²⁸

Merrheim answered privately that he was at Zimmerwald not to start a new International but simply to utter *the cry of my tortured conscience to the workers of all countries, so that they could direct themselves in a common action against the war.*²⁹ At the Conference, therefore, he supported the majority pacifist, non-revolutionary resolutions³⁰ which are expressed in the statement, *We have met together in order to join anew the broken ties of international relations and to summon the working class to reorganize and begin the struggle for peace.* The tactics for the pacifist movement would be worked out in the individual countries. In his own specific suggestions for peace, Merrheim emphasized that he would not have peace at any price nor unilaterally; Germany would have to evacuate the invaded territories, although she should be reimbursed by England and France; England, too, should abandon the German colonies she had captured.³¹ Merrheim did not believe the moment appropriate for any more vigorous action as Lenin had suggested because he estimated that the European working class was not sufficiently prepared for a revolutionary general strike. Lenin believed Merrheim was deluding himself. The former admitted that the French workers were demoralized but insisted that socialists should propagandize revolution in a manner appropriate to the circumstances, something Merrheim did not consider currently.³²

Merrheim maintained a Zimmerwaldian stance throughout the war; no change in objective circumstances would cause him to modify his limited pacifism. Back in France he was a member of the »Comité pour la Reprise des Relations Internationales« (CPRRI), formed to work for and co-

²⁷ See Alphonse MERRHEIM in Confédération Générale du Travail, XX Congrès national corporatif, September 15–21, 1919, Villeneuve-Sainte-Georges 1919, p. 171; also see Merrheim's preface to MAX HOSCHILLER's book *Le Mirage Du Sovietisme* (Paris, 1921), pp. 7–10; and Merle FAINSOD, *International Socialism and the World War*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1935, note # 16, p. 66, and Edouard DOLLÉANS, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 235.

²⁸ A complete copy is in Olga M. GANKIN and H. H. FISHER, *The Bolsheviks and the World War: The Origin of the Third International*, Stanford 1940, pp. 349–351. See also V. I. Lenin, »The Imperialist War«, in *Collected Works* (New York, 1942), Vol. XVIII, pp. 346–349.

²⁹ Alphonse MERRHEIM in: Confédération Générale du Travail, XX Congrès national corporatif, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

³⁰ See GANKIN and FISHER, *op. cit.*, pp. 329–333.

³¹ See Archives de la Préfecture de Police (A.P.P.), B/A 1535, report of November 10, 1915 (dossier # 13).

³² V. I. Lenin, »Les Marxistes révolutionnaires à la Conférence socialiste internationale (5–8 septembre 1915)«, in *Contre le Courant*, October 11, 1915, Vol. II, pp. 17–20.

ordinate national and international pacifist movements.³³ There some pressed for bold action. Trotsky, a member of the CPRRI while in France, stated that any antiwar action must not take into consideration or be limited by thoughts of national defense or of the existing political order.³⁴ Péricat, a member of the Building Trades Federation, stated bluntly: *Personally, it matters little to me if the Germans are in Marseille or in Paris. I don't have a country, and it's all the same to me if I live under the Prussian bolt or the French bolt. I shall not give a piece of my skin to save France . . .*³⁵ On the other side, Bourderon, Merrheim's socialist colleague at Zimmerwald, spoke for the majority of the CPRRI when he rejected a split with existing workers' parties or the formation of a new International, as some like Lenin were suggesting.³⁶ At a meeting of the *Comité de défense syndicaliste* (CDS), originally the syndicalist section of the CPRRI and later autonomous, Merrheim also stated that he would not consider a split with the C.G.T.³⁷ And he supported the socialist faction on the CPRRI in its belief that the Second International should be oriented in a »Zimmerwaldian sense.«³⁸ Also, when the Russian Revolution broke out, Merrheim hailed it publically. Privately, however, he regretted that the French pacifists had lost a major argument against French participation in the war, namely that their government was allied with a reactionary power, Tsarist Russia. *This revolution has come two years too late and it signifies another two years of war*, he wrote.³⁹ Merrheim shocked even his own supporters when he announced that he was opposed to a separate peace between Germany und Russia.⁴⁰ That,

³³ To carry on this work French pacifists originally established on November 21, 1915 at C.G.T. headquarters the *Comité d'Action Internationale* with ties in Berne, Switzerland to pacifist committees from other nations. On February 7, 1916, this committee changed its name to the *Comité de la reprise . . .*, which in turn divided into a socialist and syndicalist section, headed by Bourderon and Merrheim respectively. For the founding meeting of the Comité d'Action Internationale see especially A.N., F7, 13371, report of October 6, 1916 (dossier # 3); A.N., F7, 13574, report of Paris, December 20, 1915 (dossier »C.G.T. – 1915 – notes«); A.N., F7, 13574, report of December 30, 1915, M/10127 (dossier »C.G.T. – 1915 – notes«); A.P.P., B/A 1559, report of Paris, November 22, 1915 (compte rendu), dossier # 3); see also KRIEDEL, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 123.

³⁴ A.N., F7, 13371, report of October 6, 1916 (dossier # 3), and A.P.P., B/A 1558, report of Paris, October 11, 1916 (dossier # 3). The first source summarizes both Trotsky's opening statement and the meeting; the second contains a direct quote Trotsky made at this meeting.

³⁵ A.N., F7, 13371, report of October 6, 1916; see also A.P.P., B/A 1558, report of August 16, 1916.

³⁶ A.N., F7, 13371, report of October 6, 1916.

³⁷ A.N., F7, 13575, report of Paris, November 21, 1916, M/10.826.

³⁸ A.P.P., B/A 1558, report of Paris, April 4, 1916 (dossier # 3).

³⁹ A.N., F7, 13575, report of Paris, March 24, 1917.

⁴⁰ A.N., F7, report of Paris, April 4, 1917, M/11.196, and A.N., F7, 13575, report of Paris, April 13, 1917.

he believed, would hurt France because Germany could turn most of her troops against her neighbour in the west and that Merrheim did not want to see. At a meeting of the C.G.T.'s Executive Committee Jouhaux took exactly the same position. Another syndicalist, Loriot, however, disagreed and pointed out the simple fact that a separate peace would stop the killing at least in Russia and force other belligerents to come to terms with Germany and Russia. He also thought that support of a separate peace by the French would indicate their favor for the most revolutionary elements in Russia, who were also calling for immediate peace.⁴¹ But here is precisely another reason why Merrheim did not want a separate peace, since he opposed the revolutionaries to the left of the Mensheviks.⁴²

The Russian Revolution spurred Péricat to suggest that May Day 1917 be the occasion for a general work stoppage. He specifically directed his idea to Merrheim, who refused to answer.⁴³ Péricat also wanted the workers to oppose by force the departure for the front of the next class of soldiers.⁴⁴ Merrheim and the Executive Committee of his Federation refused to call a work stoppage even for one day and were content to issue a mild manifesto calling for solidarity with *the revolutionary people of Russia and Germany*.⁴⁵ The Executive Committee of the C.G.T. took the same position. One perceptive police report noted that *Among the industrial federations (in France) only one is capable of passing beyond the principal decisions of the C.G.T. and giving any demonstrations a revolutionary allure: the Federation of Metal Workers*. But, the report concluded, Merrheim refused to council demonstrations.⁴⁶

It is difficult to understand the limits of Merrheim's pacifism and behavior without knowing that at the same time that he was directing his pacifist campaign he was also exerting the greatest pressure on Jouhaux to have the latter cease his government collaboration. Throughout the war too Merrheim had sought to restore unity to the C.G.T. He had gone through great efforts to heal the break between the majority (Jouhaux's faction) and the minority (the pacifists) and he was not about to exacerbate that split or threaten his efforts for unity by agitating for a more

⁴¹ A.N., F7, 13575, report of Paris, April 4, 1917, M/11.196.

⁴² A police report confirms that concerning the issue of a separate peace between Germany and Russia Merrheim was in the center, whereas Loriot, Broutchoux, and Péricat were on the left. See A.N., F7, 13575, report of Paris, April 13, 1917.

⁴³ A.P.P., B/A 1558, report of Paris, April 13, 1917.

⁴⁴ A.N., F7, 13569, report of Paris, May 1, 1917.

⁴⁵ A.N., F7, 13272, report of April 30, 1917 and A.N., F7, 12911, a circular of the Federation of Metal Workers entitled »Pour le Premier Mai-Aux Organisations! Aux Militants.«

⁴⁶ A.N., F7, 13272, report of April 26, 1917.

radical pacifism or by preparing some antigovernment or revolutionary action. The latter might not succeed, he believed, and would certainly risk the destruction of revolutionary syndicalism.

Merrheim and Jouhaux

Merrheim's major target among the syndicalist collaborators was Jouhaux. He resented that the latter had joined the government, thereby breaking a central principle of revolutionary syndicalism and deserting the Parisian working class in the process. To make up for Jouhaux's departure, Merrheim became temporarily interim secretary-general of the C.G.T.; thus he felt he could help the Parisian workers and insure the continuation of the traditional revolutionary syndicalist movement.⁴⁷ Merrheim also demanded that Jouhaux state for the record that his departure did not officially implicate the whole C.G.T. in his collaboration. He forced Jouhaux to call a meeting of the C.G.T.'s Executive Committee and announce to it that he was going to Bordeaux, where the government had moved, in a personal capacity only. In principle, therefore, the C.G.T. was still autonomous and by remaining in Paris, Merrheim believed he symbolized the C.G.T.'s rejection of Jouhaux's action.⁴⁸

Merrheim's determination to remain within the C.G.T. and to pressure Jouhaux to quit the *union sacrée* frequently placed Merrheim in difficult or compromising situations. In October, 1914, for example, Scandinavian socialists invited the C.G.T. to Copenhagen for a proposed international conference of socialists from neutral and belligerent nations to discuss the war and to prepare for peace. Merrheim did not think the C.G.T. should participate officially because the Germans occupied neutral Belgium. *But it is equally our (the Metal Workers) opinion that the C.G.T. does not have the right to let this letter (the Scandinavians invitation) pass without an answer. And the only answer possible is to encourage the neutral nations in their action in favor of peace.*⁴⁹ The C.G.T.'s Executive Committee voted not to answer the Scandinavians' appeal. Pierre Monatte, Merrheim's very good friend, was so outraged

⁴⁷ A.N., F7, 13574, report of Paris, October 6, 1914, M. 35; A.P.P., B/A 1605, report of June, 1915, »Note sur l'attitude de Merrheim.«

⁴⁸ This information is contained in a letter Merrheim wrote to his friend and co-syndicalist, Pierre Monatte, explaining the events of September, 1914. The letter is in Jean MAITRON and Colette CHAMBELLAND, eds., *Syndicalisme révolutionnaire et communisme: les archives de Pierre Monatte*, Paris 1968, pp. 35-38.

⁴⁹ Fédération des Métaux, Procès-verbaux, Séance de la Commission Exécutive du 2 décembre 1914.

by this seeming indifference to a long history of antimilitarism that he resigned from the Executive Committee.⁵⁰ Merrheim put aside his pride and complained only mildly against the Committee's decision.⁵¹

On another occasion, however, Jouhaux attended, in July, 1916, an interallied syndicalist conference in Leeds, England, and, in Paris, even appeared before a banquet of the » *Fédération des Industriels et des Commerçants français*«. Some syndicalists called him a scab for the latter action and demanded that he resign as secretary-general of the C.G.T.⁵² Merrheim's complaint was limited to an expressing of regret that Jouhaux had again acted without consulting the C.G.T.

At times Merrheim found his own actions difficult and trying. On February 14, 1915, interallied socialists held a conference in London to assess their role in the war. On February 7, 1915, the C.G.T.'s Executive Committee debated whether to send representatives.⁵³ Merrheim argued against participation because he believed the conference would appear as an endorsement of Allied war aims.⁵⁴ Privately he also said that *Those who have refused to go to Copenhagen are not qualified to accept the invitation to go to London.*⁵⁵ The Executive Committee decided to attend, however, and picked a delegation of four representatives, Luquet, Moulinier, Jouhaux, and Merrheim. The latter seems a strange choice given his known opposition to the conference. The Executive Committee, on the other hand, obviously knew that Merrheim wanted to remain within the C.G.T.; and it was better to have him defend a minority position inside the C.G.T. than to have him agitate outside the confederation. For his part, Merrheim reluctantly agreed to go in order to defend,

⁵⁰ This episode is covered rather well in MAITRON and CHAMBELLAND, op. cit., pp. 45-85; see also ROSMER, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 172-180, and DOLLÉANS, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 226-227.

⁵¹ See the letter from the Federation of Metal Workers to the C.G.T.'s Executive Committee, dated December 16, 1914; found in A.N., F7, 13574. See also A.N., F7, 13574, report of March 1, 1915, M/9674, where some of this information is summarized.

⁵² A.N., F7, 13575, report of Paris, March 13, 1916 and report of Paris, March 13, 1916, M/10264; also *Fédération des Métaux, Procès-verbaux, Séance de la Commission Exécutive du 1er avril 1916.*

⁵³ A.N., F7, 13574, report of Paris, February 8, 1915, M/9635.

⁵⁴ His resolution to this meeting is reprinted in MAITRON and CHAMBELLAND, op. cit., pp. 87-88. Other reports on this meeting are in A.N., F7, 13574, report of Paris, February 8, 1915, M/9635; A.N., F7, 13574, report of Paris, February 23, 1915, M/9665. See also *Fédération des Métaux, Procès-verbaux, Séance de la Commission Exécutive du 10 Février 1915*, where Merrheim reported on the meeting of February 7th to his federation and A.N., F7, 13574, report of Paris, March 1, 1915, M/9674, which reports on a meeting of the C.G.T.'s Executive Committee where a debate took place on why Merrheim accepted the invitation to go to London.

⁵⁵ A.N., F7, 13574, report of Paris, February 8, 1915, M/9635.

as he told his Federation, his pacifist views.⁵⁶ He also hoped that the London Conference would be *a first step towards a truly international conference where all nations would be invited and represented.*⁵⁷ Merrheim's sincerity did not eliminate his contradictions, which themselves are explained by his desire to remain within the C.G.T. and to lead a pacifist movement based upon the *s t a t u s q u o a n t e*.

Constant pressure by Merrheim against Jouhaux began to show minor but hopeful gains. Signs of a political rapprochement between the two men were evident long before they were publically reconciled in 1917. Merrheim's methods included insistence upon respect for traditional form, the need for consultations in the Executive Committee for example, as well as publicizing the peace program within the limits of the censor's restrictions; moreover, this did not preclude dramatic face to face confrontations with Jouhaux. At an important meeting of the C.G.T.'s Executive Committee on June 26, 1915, Merrheim read a blistering attack against Jouhaux's collaboration. The speech left Jouhaux very defensive and »very pale.«⁵⁸ In May, 1915, Merrheim and his supporters on the Executive Committee forced Jouhaux to hold a conference of the C.G.T. On May 30, 1915, Jouhaux's critics forced his hand by complaining that the Confederation had not met since the war began.⁵⁹ At the meeting Jouhaux had to answer, he had to define a position. This he did and he argued that peace should be based upon the following principles: (1) the suppression of secret treaties; (2) the respect for the sovereignty of all nations; (3) disarmament; and (4) compulsory arbitration of international disputes. He believed also that the C.G.T. should meet only at the end of the war, at the same time as a diplomatic peace conference; he wanted no meeting of the organization while France was under the German attack. Already, however, this program was a concession to Merrheim since at the beginning of the war Jouhaux refused even to define any peace terms. Bourderon, of the Barrel Makers Union and Merrheim's friend, disagreed with Jouhaux's premise of no general meeting until after the war: French syndicalists, he argued, should gather to instruct the secretary-general of their sentiment and wishes on the war. On the surface it was a most logical request and one that Jouhaux could not easily

⁵⁶ Fédération des Métaux, Procès-verbaux, Séance de la Commission Exécutive du 10 février 1915.

⁵⁷ Quoted by KRIEGEL, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 104.

⁵⁸ See A.N., F7, 13574, report of June 28, 1915, M/9858. At this meeting Jouhaux told the Committee that if it believed his collaboration was inappropriate then it should mandate him to cease it. The Committee, however, gave the secretary-general a vote of confidence.

⁵⁹ This meeting is covered in A.N., F7, 13574, report of May 31, 1915, M/9812. See also a small note about the meeting in A.N., F7, 13574, report of June 2, 1915, M/9813.

refuse, although he suspected that Bourderon wanted the C.G.T. to take the initiative for peace. Bourderon's proposal, however, carried and the Executive Committee decided to hold a conference on August 15, 1915. A police spy wrote that *Merrheim had triumphed*.⁶⁰ For the first time since the war had begun, the majority in the C.G.T. could no longer put the minority off; Jouhaux now had to explain officially his actions since August, 1914.

At the Conference Merrheim was anxious to air the pacifist stance.⁶¹ Under no illusions that the majority would suddenly become conciliatory, he hoped that the Conference would be a *point of departure for a more general action . . . (against the war)*.⁶² Both he and Jouhaux stated their peace objectives, summing up too thereby the major differences between them. In the process it was also evident that Jouhaux had made a slight concession to Merrheim. The latter condemned the collaboration and wanted the C.G.T. to participate immediately in the pacifist program. He did not want, however, that France ask for peace unilaterally nor establish peace as long as Germany occupied invaded territories.⁶³ Jouhaux, on the other hand, insisted that *we shall first examine the faults committed by our enemies, who have done nothing to prevent the war. I do not say »war until the end« anymore than I say »immediate peace«*. He concluded: *we will make peace when the proper moment comes*, by which he meant after an Allied victory.⁶⁴ The Conference passed Jouhaux's resolution, in which he reiterated the peace proposals he made on May 30, 1915, and which assumed the necessity of an Allied victory before a settlement of the war.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, privately Merrheim celebrated a victory. Out of the public eye Merrheim had forced Jouhaux to write in his resolution that *the conference, disapproving all policies of conquest, appeals to the international proletariat for peace . . .*⁶⁶ Once again, Jouhaux, who had refused to define any terms for peace, did so and now quite publically. It was Merrheim who had forced him to talk

⁶⁰ A.N., F7, 13574, report of June 2, 1915, M/9813.

⁶¹ See his letter of July 30, 1915, to Monatte, in MAITRON and CHAMBELLAND, op. cit., pp. 140-143.

⁶² Fédération des Métaux, Procès-verbaux, Séance de la Commission Exécutive du 14 août 1915.

⁶³ Conférence confédérale du 15 août 1915, in: L'Union des Métaux, no. 62, May-December 1915, pp. 16-17. For a brief account see A.N., F7, 13574, report of August 16, 1915, M/9913.

⁶⁴ Jouhaux's position is spelled out in A.P.P., B/A 1605, report of July 15, 1915, »note sur l'attitude de la C.G.T. et des organisations syndicales du département de la Seine depuis le 1er avril 1915,« 30 pp.

⁶⁵ Conférence confédérale du 15 août 1915, in: L'Union des Métaux, no. 62, May-December 1915, p. 17.

⁶⁶ A.N., F7, 13574, report of September 6, 1915, M/9938.

about self determination, compulsory arbitration, secret diplomacy, and the arms race.⁶⁷ A police reporter stated bluntly: *Jouhaux is not very hostile to Merrheim's pacifist intrigues.*⁶⁸ Immediately after the Conference, Merrheim and his friends gathered to celebrate their victory and decided to continue their pacifist campaign because events so far, especially the Conference, had encouraged them.⁶⁹

Developments in 1916 caused Merrheim and Jouhaux to move even closer, although there was still a great deal of friction between them and publically they still appeared as enemies. Strikes, which had been few in 1914 and 1915 compared to previous years, began to increase significantly in 1916.⁷⁰ Unions, especially those in the war industries, began to complain about the rising cost of living. Since many of these were metal workers unions, Merrheim was especially interested in their plight. Nationally and internationally, sentiment grew for a more revolutionary peace program than the one Merrheim had suggested. Anarchists from the journal » *Temps Nouveaux* « formed a dissident group within the French pacifist movement in order to plan very vigorous antiwar actions. An international socialist conference met in Kienthal in April, 1916, and condemned those pacifists who believed that compulsory arbitration and disarmament could insure peace. It proclaimed that only revolutionary mass action could guarantee peace.⁷¹ And at the end of 1916, President Woodrow Wilson of the United States asked all belligerents to define their peace terms.

In December, 1916, the C.G.T. met to reassess its wartime role and to discuss Wilson's note. The pacifist minority gathered beforehand to decide on a common strategy for the conference.⁷² At this meeting Merrheim complained that some minority syndicalists wanted a permanent split from the majority. The »Comité pour la défense du syndicalisme« planned a conference of minority delegates to meet on the eve of the C.G.T.'s gathering. Merrheim hoped that the C.G.T. would not play into this groups hands and consummate the split. At another pre-conference meeting,⁷³ he advised his friends not to attack and criticize Jouhaux at this moment because provincial delegates might not understand the point of the fight. Péricat and others, however, felt timing made no difference since their position was correct. What they did not understand was that

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ A.N., F7, 13574, report of August 25, 1915, M/9919.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ See Robert BRECQ, *Le Mouvement syndical en France*, Paris 1963, p. 92.

⁷¹ Merle FAINSOD, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁷² A.N., F7, 13569, report of Paris, November 28, 1916.

⁷³ A.P.P., B/A 1558, report of December 22, 1916.

Merrheim's goal was unity with Jouhaux and that he would never break with the pre-war C.G.T.

When the December Conference of the C.G.T. met⁷⁴ delegates debated, among other issues, the attitude of the C.G.T.'s Executive Committee since August, 1914, and war aims. Merrheim wanted Jouhaux to respond to Wilson's note. By this time Jouhaux had no objection to defining peace terms, as long as he did not have to abandon the Allied cause. The Conference, therefore, agreed unanimously that all governments should define their peace objectives. The French government, the resolution continued, should respond »favorably« to Wilson's note.⁷⁵

The official reconciliation between Merrheim and Jouhaux came in December, 1917, and was directly related to the advent to power of Clemenceau. The latter became premier in November, 1917 for the purpose of reviving the flagging French war effort. In mid-April, 1917, a French military offensive led by Nivelle against the Germans had failed disastrously. It coincided with mutenies in the army in May and was followed by the most important labor strikes to date. In 1917, 696 strikes had broken out involving a total of 298,810 strikers. The most serious were those of the clothing makers in May and June and of the war industry workers during the summer and early fall of 1917. By May, 1917, many syndicalists were calling for renewed antigovernment action to celebrate May Day and also to demonstrate their support for the Russian revolution.

When Clemenceau became premier, the C.G.T. had cause for concern. Government's before Clemenceau's tended to be accomodating to the workers in public, although they were frequently repressive in private. It was the reverse with Clemenceau: »secret corruption and public repression.«⁷⁶ For Clemenceau repression was part of his psychological warfare against the workers.⁷⁷ In public Clemenceau wanted to appear extremely tough and this precluded official cooperation with the C.G.T. For their part, the workers remembered Clemenceau as the Minister of the Interior who called out the troops against them in the bloody strike of Villeneuve Saint-Georges in 1908. Under these circumstances Jouhaux had no choice but to abruptly end his collaboration. Therefore Merrheim and Jouhaux's factions met at the C.G.T.'s Conference of Clermont-Ferrand and agreed to work for peace on the basis of an essentially Zimmer-

⁷⁴ Conférence des Fédérations corporatives, des Unions de Syndicats, des Bourses du Travail, in: *La Bataille*, from no. 418 (December 24) to no. 420 (December 26, 1916).

⁷⁵ The text of this resolution is in A.N., F7, 13372, »Au sein de la classe ouvrière,« p. 29 and in: *La Confédération Générale du Travail et le mouvement syndical*, op. cit., p. 152.

⁷⁶ KRIEGEL, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 194.

⁷⁷ Jean MAX, *De Zimmerwald au Bolchevisme*, Paris 1920, note #2, p. 121.

wald platform.⁷⁸ A minority at the Conference proposed a resolution⁷⁹ expressly condemning the *union sacrée* policy of 1914 and made a point of affirming *its profound sympathy (and) its respect for all the Russian revolutionaries . . .* The majority resolution, the one Merrheim and Jouhaux supported, did not mention the previous collaboration, praised the peace proposals of the Russian Revolution and of President Wilson, which it defined in Wilsonian terms, and called upon all governments to define a peace program. Merrheim had moved somewhat closer to Jouhaux and Jouhaux closer to Merrheim.

Merrheim and Collaboration

An important link between Merrheim's limited pacifist campaign and his desire to rejoin forces with Jouhaux was his overriding concern for the material well-being of his workers. For that reason and in order to keep the C.G.T. intact during the war, and to insure that the movement he had worked so hard to build was not destroyed, Merrheim felt impelled to maintain his own unofficial but quite close ties with the government and with Jouhaux, even while he was publically attacking both. These concerns involved him in activities which help explain the limitations of his war-time behavior. It is Merrheim's private letters, so far unpublished, which permit the historian for the first time to put together the complete story of Merrheim's career during the war.⁸⁰

Merrheim was a trade unionist as well as a radical. In the former capacity he labored to protect and to improve the job status, wages, and working conditions of his rank-and file. War, on the other hand, would have an adverse effect on unionism in the metallurgical industry: the government would insist that workers make special sacrifices to increase the production of war materiel. Also, the authorities would hardly tolerate any revolutionary propaganda or dangerous pacifist activity in such an industry. Moreover, the government drafted many metal workers and

⁷⁸ *Compte rendu de la Conférence extraordinaire des Fédérations nationales, Bourse du Travail et Unions des Syndicats, tenue à Clermont-Ferand. les 23, 24, 25 décembre 1917 (édité par la C.G.T.) in Vol. 8, 157 pp. (Paris, w.d. 1919). See p. 155 for the resolution passed by the Conference.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁸⁰ What we will henceforth refer to as the Merrheim Archives are letters written to and by Merrheim, and which cover mostly the years 1914 and 1915, although there are several letters from earlier years. A microfilm of the entire collection is in the Institut Maruce Thorez, Paris, hereafter cited as IMT. The Institut Français d'Histoire Sociale has only a partial collection of these letters on microfilm. I would like to take this opportunity to thank M. David Diamont, director of the IMT for giving me access to the Merrheim Archives.

filled their places with non-union labor, women, children, and even foreign workers. Industrialists asked this non-union labor force to work long hours at low wages, a demand they also made on union labor. Merrheim did all he could to minimize the extent and effect of such measures. This is why throughout the war he was on intimate terms with some of his public enemies. For example, along with Jouhaux, he belonged to the *Comité d'Action* which gave the Ministry of Labor considerable useful information on labor conditions and labor sentiment in the metallurgical industry. Merrheim also cooperated with the Senate investigations of labor conditions as well as with Mixed Commissions of representatives from labor, government, and industry. He also frequently appealed to Jouhaux or to Albert Thomas, the socialist under-Secretary of State for War, to intercede for workers having any important business with the government. And he maintained especially close relations with Thomas, thereby establishing a pipeline into the Ministry of War. Even Clemenceau tried to enlist Merrheim's assistance when the former became premier in November, 1917. By discouraging labor agitation and by providing the government with data on the metallurgical industry, Merrheim obtained favors for his workers. He also, of course, was assisting in the government's production of war materials. Because his motives were sympathetic to workers, because his collaboration was unofficial and his pacifism sincere, he believed that his war-time activities differed qualitatively from Jouhaux's. However, Jouhaux was simply more open about his assistance to the government and in this matter the line between Merrheim and Jouhaux was rather fine.

Merrheim's unpublicized cooperation with the government makes abundantly clear why he never broke definitively with Jouhaux, demonstrates the limits of his revolutionary syndicalism, and portends his choice of a reformist program in the troubled and potentially revolutionary times during and immediately after the war.

At the beginning of August, 1914, the press announced the formation of a *Comité des Secours National* whose function it was to come to the assistance, in Paris and the provinces, of women, children, and old people in need, without distinction for their opinions or religious beliefs.⁸¹ On this committee sat Maurice Barres, Lepine, a former police chief, Charles Maurras, industrialists and bankers as well as Jouhaux and Bled, secretary of the Union des Syndicats de la Seine.⁸² Merrheim and Lenoir, a co-secretary of the Federation of Metal Workers, publically attacked Jouhaux for working with the enemies of the working class.⁸³ In private, how-

⁸¹ Quoted by Bernard GEORGES and Denise TINTANT, *Léon Jouhaux*, Paris 1962, p. 143.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

ever, Merrheim's protest were not as serious. One police reporter wrote that Merrheim raised some objections in principle against the *Comité de Secours* but without declaring himself pointblank against the participation (of Jouhaux).⁸⁴ When syndicalists discussed collaboration on the *Comité de Secours* in the C.G.T.'s Executive Committee, Merrheim spoke for his Federation in the following moderate terms: *We (the C.G.T.) must limit our collaboration in the light of our principles. Our collaboration on the Comité de Secours National is a step in a bad direction.*⁸⁵ A reporter perceptively noted that he (Merrheim) understood that in collaborating too closely with the government, the C.G.T. would lose the right to appeal . . . for peace at a time that it shall choose itself.⁸⁶ The implication was that Merrheim's objection to C.G.T. involvement on this committee was purely tactical. Also, at this moment Merrheim had become interim-secretary of the C.G.T., which meant that he would have to have some kind of working relationship with Jouhaux. And in December, 1914, the *Comité d'Action*, a socialist-syndicalist committee to which Merrheim belonged, issued the following rather enthusiastic statement about the *Comité de Secours*: *The Comité d'Action can only render homage to the work which the Comité de Secours has followed since the beginning of the war. Made up of elements coming from all social classes and all parties, this committee has fulfilled its task quite impartially and very conscientiously. It has assisted with material misery and work-stoppage engendered by the war and thereby has »also assisted in the national defense.«⁸⁷ It is unfair to saddle Merrheim with this favorable proclamation, but surely he must have appreciated the material relief the comité des Secours was providing workers.*

It was the same with the Mixed Commissions. Merrheim disliked the manner in which they were formed and also their composition, but he never completely rejected them. In March, 1915, the Prefect of the Seine named members of Mixed Commissions composed of representatives from government, business, and labor. They were supposed to solve any labor difficulties that threatened industrial production. Merrheim complained that the government had not consulted the C.G.T. about their formation or their membership. He regretted too that Jouhaux had accepted a position on the Mixed Commission without C.G.T. approval. One syndicalist told Merrheim that he opposed C.G.T. participation in the Mixed Commissions because he did not want to associate *with our ad-*

⁸⁴ A.P.P., B/A 1605, report of September 10, 1915, »Notes retrospectives sur les divisions intérieures du Comité Confédéral.«

⁸⁵ A.P.P., B/A 1605, report of June, 1915, »Note sur l'attitude de Merrheim.«

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Bataille Syndicaliste, no. 1.330, December 17, 1914, p. 2.

versaries.⁸⁸ But another syndicalist noted that the actions of the Federation of Metal Workers since the beginning of the war implied the acceptance of such commissions and *We cannot therefore come out today against these mixed commissions*.⁸⁹ He meant that the metal workers were already cooperating unofficially with the government. The problem for Merrheim was the clear nature of the class collaboration implied in membership in such a body. Yet he did not wish to dismiss an institution that could help the workers. He proposed, therefore, a compromise. The Federation of Metal Workers, Merrheim said, would officially state that it was not a partisan of the Mixed Commissions and that it regretted their formation, but at the same time it would invite its unions to give the commissions their assistance if they wished, because the Mixed Commissions might be of some value.⁹⁰

As a revolutionary syndicalist, Merrheim believed workers should not cooperate with the government or petition it for relief because this violated the concept of workers' direct action. Yet without making a fuss about it, Merrheim testified in July, 1915, before a Senatorial Commission inquiring about labor conditions among industrial workers. There he talked mostly about salaries. At one point he told the senators that *we would only accept a tampering with our salaries if the government commandeers the factories*. This was a plea for egalitarian treatment. In any case, after the session he could report to his Federation that he thought wages would remain the same.⁹¹ And this was one point of his appearance before the senators, namely to protect wages. On another occasion during the war Merrheim testified before a coalition of left-wing deputies at the Palais-Bourbon.⁹² Because strikes had broken out in the spring of 1918 among younger metal workers, the C.G.T.'s Executive Committee sent Jouhaux and Merrheim to the deputies to explain the causes of the labor unrest and to define the C.G.T.'s attitude towards it. Jouhaux explained that the worker's ignorance of general conditions in France had caused the strikes. Workers, he added, wanted the government to take them into its confidence; it should define its peace terms and it should recognize the right of the working class to have a voice in public affairs. Merrheim, too, did not blame the workers for the strikes. The govern-

⁸⁸ Fédération des Métaux, Procès-verbaux, Séance de la Commission Exécutive du samedi 3 avril 1915.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Fédération des Métaux, Procès-verbaux, Séance de la Commission Exécutive du 24 juillet 1915.

⁹² His testimony can be found in the journal »Syndicats«, no. 135, May 10, 1939, p. 2. An even fuller account because unlike the former it also includes Jouhaux's testimony to the same group is in: *La Leçon des faits* (Paris, 1918), pp. 4-19.

ment and the employers, which kept the workers ignorant of their intentions, were responsible. *It is necessary that one speak clearly to the workers, explain to them the goals that are being followed in this war, and give to them the impression that something is being done to promote peace.* This testimony, not so terrible in itself, was a radical departure from the traditional revolutionary syndicalist practice of not cooperating with the government. Merrheim even found himself being criticised by a member of his own Federation for taking part in a parliamentary meeting. Another metal worker demanded that such future participation cease. Merrheim answered his critics: contact with the deputies, he said, was a logical consequence of remaining within the C.G.T. Executive Committee, and that was desirable since it kept the C.G.T. on a more proper course than if the minority was not there. In any case, he continued, appearing before the parliamentary group was not a political act.⁹³ It is difficult to understand what Merrheim meant by the latter explanation since pre-war revolutionary syndicalists, Merrheim included, were clear that precisely this sort of contact with government deputies was undesirable.

Merrheim had much more direct contact with the government, however, through his work on the *Comité d'Action*. On September 9, 1915, shortly after Jouhaux had left Paris for Bordeaux, the Executive Committee of the C.G.T. decided to get together with the Socialist Party in order to form a *Commission d'Action*.⁹⁴ As interim secretary of the C.G.T. I (Merrheim) was delegated to ask the Socialist Party for the creation of the *Comité d'Action* . . .⁹⁵ The committee came into existence on the tenth. Its ostensible function was to assist the public authorities with any matters of interest to the working class.⁹⁶ The *Comité d'Action* also provided the government with information on supplies, work stoppages, work assignments, and other similar matters.⁹⁷ In short, it worked rather closely with the government for the production of war materials and for the prosecution of the war itself. To facilitate its job, the *Comité* divided into eight subcommissions, the most important of which was the *Commission du Travail* chaired by Merrheim.⁹⁸ In April, 1916, the subcommis-

⁹³ Fédération des Métaux, Procès-verbaux, Séance de la Commission Exécutive du mardi, 11 juin 1918.

⁹⁴ A.N., F7, 13574, joint report of Bordeaux, October 9, 1914 and of Paris, October 6, 1914, M/35.

⁹⁵ »A L'Union des Mécaniciens de la Seine«, in: L'Union des Métaux no. 62, May-December 1915, p. 15.

⁹⁶ A.N., F7, 13574, joint report of Bordeaux, October 9, 1914 and of Paris, October 6 (1914), M/35.

⁹⁷ A.N., F7, 13574, report of Paris, February 4, 1915, M/9621.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

sions were reorganized and Merrheim chaired the one dealing with workers in war industries, while Jouhaux, who was also a member of the *Comité*, headed the subcommission of working conditions and salaries.⁹⁹

There is the possibility that for the syndicalists the *Comité d'Action* had another, less public goal, namely to prevent any right wing reaction against the C.G.T. Jouhaux on September 3rd warned his Executive Committee against the possible arrest of revolutionaries and of a reaction against the left. He advised the C.G.T. to cooperate with the Socialist Party to avert this.¹⁰⁰ Merrheim dismissed this opinion by charging that some would use the pretext of a reactionary peril in order to join the government at Bordeaux.¹⁰¹ In this instance Merrheim was scoffing at the rumor of an anti left reaction in order to criticise those who would leave Paris to join the *union sacrée*. But in fact there was considerable fear in C.G.T. ranks of government repression and what better way to avoid it than by cooperating with the authorities on trade union matters.

The government knew whom to contact on the *Comité d'Action* for vital information on the war industries. At the end of September, 1914, Renaudel, a socialist working with the authorities, asked Merrheim to submit a detailed report for Marcel Sembat, the Minister of Public Works, on the factories which were capable of producing war materiel.¹⁰² Merrheim's response was precise and quite useful to the government: two types of factories, he wrote, could produce war goods, the arsenals of the war and naval ministries and private industrial firms; Merrheim would ask other federation secretaries about the former, but he sent Renaudel a complete list of private factories capable of assisting in the war effort. After some advice on how to organize the latter, he asked for good will towards those workers who would *furnish their technical capacity and their effort*.¹⁰³

This kind of request from the government was no isolated incident, and Merrheim frequently linked it to claims for union labor. Thus, he was instrumental in providing the army corps of engineers with 5,000 workers from the *Bourse du Travail* in Paris to build the Camp Retranché de Paris. He then made sure that the military governor of Paris knew the advantages of hiring union labor: syndicalists did not ask as much in wages as did other non-union professionals, and the quality of union labor was generally superior, a fact of great importance for the national

⁹⁹ A.N., F7, 13272, report of April 17, 1916.

¹⁰⁰ A.N., F7, 13574, report of Paris, February 4, 1915, M/9621.

¹⁰¹ »A L'Union des Mécaniciens de la Seine,« in: L'Union des Métaux, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Letter from Alphonse Merrheim to the *Comité d'Action*, dated Paris, 15/9/1914, the Merrheim Archives (IMT).

defense. It was also very important, he concluded, *for moral and very much in the interests of the public order as well as for national defense* that no one under contract to the army gain profits or exploit the taxpayer. Finally, qualified labor, by which he meant union labor, could make goods quickly and well.¹⁰⁴ In another letter to the military governor, Merrheim underscored the point that it was *thanks to their* (the workers) *activity and to their professional know how that the services of the corps of engineers could rapidly put the trench camp into a ready state of defense.* Having made that point, he then noted that now that the camp was finished many workers would be laid off, but that a certain number would be needed to run the camp. He asked the governor to choose the latter *in accord with the interested union organizations and from the Bourse du Travail of Paris.*¹⁰⁵

Merrheim's assistance paid off for the workers. A Ministry of the Interior report stated that workers in war industries had experienced some ameliorations, thanks to the activities of the *Comité d'Action*. On another occasion Millerand, the Minister of War, was conducting a campaign against slakers in industry and he asked the Federation of Metal Workers to let him know who were *all the unsound workers* who were taking the place of *the professional workers*. Merrheim and the Federation of Metal Workers agreed to *furnish this documentation . . .*¹⁰⁶ Presumably the government would fire the inefficient non-union labor and Merrheim would have scored another point for his people.

Merrheim's closest and most important contact with the government was Albert Thomas, a socialist who from October 29, 1914 was the Under Secretary of State for Artillery and from December 12, 1916 to September 12, 1917 was Minister of Armaments. Shortly before he took up his first post, Thomas asked Merrheim to meet with him in the offices of the Ministry of Labor. He told Merrheim that the Minister of Labor had asked him, Thomas, to assist in accelerating the production of war materials. He asked Merrheim to provide information concerning salaries and working conditions in plants producing war goods; he, in return, would be in a position to help workers in this industry. This all implied, of course, that Merrheim would be willing to cooperate with Thomas' task. Merrheim agreed to press at least for workers' claims and his Executive Committee concurred that he should meet periodically with Thomas to do this.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Alphonse Merrheim to the Military Governor of Paris, dated Paris, October 23, 1914, in the Merrheim Archives (IMT).

¹⁰⁵ Letter of Alphonse Merrheim to Monsieur P. Doumer, chef de Cabinet du Gouverneur Militaire de la Place de Paris, dated November 12, 1914, in the Merrheim Archives (IMT).

¹⁰⁶ A.N., F7, 13574, report of Paris, April 6, 1915, M/19724.

Merrheim's first report to Thomas came in October, 1914 and dealt only with trade union matters. In it he reviewed the general state of the metallurgical industry, detailing the drop in wages, the increase in hours, and the deterioration of conditions. He hoped Thomas could improve matters. In the same report, however, Merrheim also pointed out that it was the intervention of the Federation of Metal Workers which had prevented a metal workers strike in Saint-Nazaire.¹⁰⁸ Thomas and the government knew their man.

Thomas was the important link between the C.G.T. and the government. When Jouhaux and Merrheim wanted workshop delegates established and recognized by the employers, they negotiated with Thomas.¹⁰⁹ When a worker wrote to Merrheim complaining of changes in the schedule of night-time labor resulting in fewer hours of pay, Merrheim wrote a long letter to Thomas asking for help.¹¹⁰ In return for his cooperation with Thomas, Merrheim insisted that the latter should provide not only favors for workers, but should attempt to grant them fundamental guarantees. It was especially important that the government take extra care in the hiring of non-professionals and of nonunion labor, that the role of the Mixed Commissions be defined precisely, and that the workers' delegates should always be approved by the workers' organizations.¹¹¹ It was over official guarantees that Merrheim expressed considerable disappointment with Thomas, however. Merrheim knew full well that Thomas could not provide workers with the security they wanted; that had to come from the Minister of War himself.¹¹² Still, he pressured Thomas. And his friendship with Thomas did not stop Merrheim from expressing great anger at the former when he attempted to make French workers' work harder,¹¹³ or to berate Thomas for not consulting enough with the workers' organizations.¹¹⁴ In spite of this tension, a police spy could report that the presence of Thomas in the government had been the

¹⁰⁷ See »A L'Union des Mécaniciens de la Seine,« in: *L'Union des Métaux*, op. cit., p. 14, and »L'Action Fédérale,« in: *L'Union des Métaux*, no. 62, May-December 1915, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Alphonse Merrheim to Albert Thomas, dated Paris, October 29, 1914, found in the Guesde Archives (no. 45716), the International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam.

¹⁰⁹ A.N., F7, 13575, report of Paris, February 13, 1917.

¹¹⁰ See the letter of Eugens Kernst to (Alphonse) Merrheim, dated Saint Mans, September 14, 1914, in the Merrheim Archives (IMT), and the letter of Alphonse Merrheim to Albert Thomas, dated October 27 (1914), in the Merrheim Archives (IMT).

¹¹¹ A.N., F7, 13574, report of Paris, July 3, 1915, M/9865; also see »Action Fédérale,« in: *L'Union des Métaux*, op. cit., pp. 4-6.

¹¹² A.P.P., B/A 1535, report of September 14, 1915.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Fédération des Métaux, Procès-verbaux, Séance de la Commission Exécutive du Samedi 20 mai 1916.

best, if not only guarantee syndicalists had had for their personal safety.¹¹⁵ This estimation is one sided for surely Merrheim's cooperation with the government helped also.

Merrheim also interceded with the government to perform private favors for workers. In December, 1914, officials arrested and put into a concentration camp a member of the Federation of Teachers, Julie Bertrand, for her antimilitarist activities. Union officials wrote to Merrheim asking for assistance and the latter began to work steadily for Bertrand's release, mostly by petitioning Marcel Sembat, the Socialist Minister.¹¹⁶ On another occasion a man wrote to Merrheim complaining of snags in his application for French citizenship. Would Merrheim, he asked, speak to Jouhaux who might speak to Sembat.¹¹⁷ It is impossible to tell what effect Merrheim had on these cases, but it is significant that syndicalists who needed assistance from the government knew that Merrheim was the man to see.

Contact with Thomas also personally benefitted Merrheim. On several notable occasions Thomas warned Merrheim about the dangers of the latter's pacifist campaign.¹¹⁸ Thomas advised Merrheim that while France was being attacked, pacifism was ill-advised. He warned Merrheim to be prudent: *d'ont ruin yourself*, he said. Thomas also told Merrheim that the government was watching his correspondance, something Merrheim already knew, and that certain unnamed ministers had it out for him. Merrheim would not cease his pacifist campaign, but was undoubtedly grateful that Thomas was looking out for him.

Because of Merrheim's political moderation and his behind-the-scenes cooperation, his value to the government was great. No wonder then that when Clemenceau became premier he contacted Merrheim. Actually, Merrheim's first reaction to Clemenceau's assumption of the premiership was fear that the government would now arrest him for his pacifist activities.¹¹⁹ A police spy wrote that all the directors of the C.G.T. became reserved when Clemenceau came to power, but that Merrheim was especially cautious and that *the pacifist propaganda is going through a period of inaction*.¹²⁰ Merrheim need not have worried, however, because early in December, 1917, Clemenceau »quickly established rela-

¹¹⁵ A.P.P., B/A 1558, report of January 5, 1917.

¹¹⁶ See the many letters in the Merrheim Archives, IMT, from December, 1914 to February, 1915, which deal with this case.

¹¹⁷ Letter from Franco Caiti to Alphonse Merrheim, dated Romilly, November 23, 1914, in the Merrheim Archives (IMT).

¹¹⁸ See Fédération des Métaux, Procès-verbaux, Séance de la Commission Exécutive du 5 juin (1915), and Séance de la Commission Exécutive du 19 juin 1915.

¹¹⁹ KRIEDEL, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 228.

¹²⁰ A.N., F7, 13575, report of November 26, 1917, P/11838.

tions-discretely and perseveringly- with Merrheim, the pacifist leader.¹²¹ In a private interview with Merrheim, Clemenceau, seeking to win over the syndicalist, *affirmed to him his sympathies for the working class.*¹²² Later the premier proposed that Merrheim undertake a mission to Russia, presumably to intercede with Lenin and Trotsky for the continuation of the war. Merrheim replied that *It is already too late.*¹²³ On another occasion, Clemenceau, through an intermediary, suggested that Merrheim join the cabinet to serve as a liaison between the government and organized labor. Merrheim rejected the offer and pointed out how little political leaders knew about the mentality of revolutionary syndicalists.¹²⁴ Actually, the government had a better idea about the mentality of some revolutionary syndicalists than Merrheim could have imagined. The latter could not accept a post with the government – that would be too conscious a break with revolutionary syndicalism – but it is significant that Clemenceau seriously thought Merrheim was right for the job.

Not all syndicalists approved of Merrheim's double role of government critic and government collaborator. At one meeting of the C.G.T.'s Executive Committee, Guinchard of the Transport Workers Union attacked Merrheim's attitude: *But you (Merrheim), he shouted, belong to a federation which makes the engines of death; if you want peace, call for a general strike of the Metal Workers.*¹²⁵ Merrheim answered lamely that *I estimate that even if one stops the fabrication of munitions and canons, one would not stop the war because the killing would continue by other means. Besides, most of the canons come from America.*¹²⁶ At a meeting of the *Comité pour la reprise des relations internationales* Merrheim heard himself denounced for working with the *Comité d'Action* and for cooperating with Jouhaux and Renaudel.¹²⁷ Jouhaux also criticised Merrheim's double role but from a different perspective. The former decried Merrheim's private cooperation with Thomas while refusing to admit he did so publically.¹²⁸ The public antagonism between

¹²¹ Henry MAUMOURY, *Police de Guerre, 1914–1919*, Paris 1937, p. 99.

¹²² A.P.P., B/A 1558, report of Paris, December 14, 1917, and KRIEGEL, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, note # 1, p. 228.

¹²³ See KRIEGEL, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 228.

¹²⁴ Fédération des Métaux, Procès-verbaux, (Séance de la) Commission Exécutive du Samedi 2 février 1918.

¹²⁵ A.N., F7, 13575, report of Paris, March 27, 1916, M/10.291.

¹²⁶ A.N., F7, 13575, report of Paris, March 28, 1916; this report is the second source of information on this subject, shorter than the immediately preceding one. The quote cited here, however, does not appear in the preceding account.

¹²⁷ A.N., F7, 13575, »Le Comité D'Action Internationale,« from October 6, 1916 to December 22, 1916; and A.P.P., B/A 1558, report of Paris, December 5, 1916.

¹²⁸ A.P.P., B/A 1535, report of Paris, September 14, 1915, »Réunion du Comité Con-

the two men, however, did not prevent them from working together frequently to press for workers claims.¹²⁹ And the latter was the reason that Merrheim cooperated with the government, but privately so he could think he was not violating an important principle of revolutionary syndicalism, namely its opposition to the middle class state and politics. Merrheim held his revolutionary syndicalist beliefs sincerely, but his love for and commitment to the workers was also deep and in this crises situation Merrheim could do no better than place himself in a contradictory situation.

Merrheim's career during the war reveals a part of his political character and activity hitherto unknown and also indicates the need for historians to reformulate their traditional view of him and his relationship to revolutionary syndicalism. Merrheim had come to revolutionary syndicalism early, when only 20, and remained one of its most dedicated and dedicated activists. He faithfully subscribed to all the ideals of the movement—antistatism, antimilitarism, direct economic action by workers, an apolitical working class movement, and the notion that material ameliorations and organization coupled with a revolutionary education would prepare the workers to one day overthrow the capitalist state in a general strike. Before the war, however, Merrheim prepared so thoroughly for revolution, that he came to emphasize the preparations for the revolution rather than the revolution itself. Throughout the prewar years he never believed that the syndicalist movement was sufficiently developed or ready to match the power and organizational efficiency of the employers and the state. Yet to him this kind of power was an absolutely necessary precondition for the revolutionary general strike. Quite unknown to himself he had lost faith in the real possibility of revolution while he continued preparing and organizing for revolution and subscribing to it as a goal. He, therefore, never considered that the war might offer an opportunity for revolutionary agitation among the masses; he viewed it only as an unfortunate, tragic interruption of the progress in the syndicalist movement, something to be ended immediately so that syndicalists could return to planning and organizing for the social revolution. Central also to Merrheim's considerations was his genuine love for his rank-and-file as well as his concern for the trade union organization. These considerations largely explain why he certainly violated the spirit of his own beliefs. He also tended to be a timid and fearful person and this too operated in his decision making process.

fédérale (de la C.G.T.); and A.N., F7, 13575, report of Paris, September 21, 1916, M/10696.

¹²⁹ See for example, A.N., F7, 13575, report of September 21, 1916, M/10696.

Even more significant than his cooperation with the government or his relatively moderate pacifist program was that Merrheim's character and political considerations caused him to frustrate and discourage some significant political and economic demands made by his own metal workers. From 1917 onwards, metal workers began to strike with increasing frequency. Their strikes began as economic drives, protests against the higher cost of living, but by 1919 a great many of the strikers were making serious political demands. At the end of June, 1919, over 300 000 metal workers had gone out on wildcat strikes in the Loire and Seine Valleys.¹³⁰ Although these strikes had begun as demands for a shorter work week their central claim soon became support for the Russian Revolution and a revolutionary action against their own government. What is remarkable about Merrheim's role in these strikes was its almost completely negative character. Merrheim refused to press for any but the mildest economic gains and generally wanted the strikes over and industrial peace restored. He refused to consider expanding the movement to the political arena. Even the most notable gain he obtained for his Federation undercut the position of the strikers. In 1919, Merrheim and the leaders of the Federation of Metal Workers signed an agreement with the employers in their industry granting the workers the 48-hour week. But the strikers were demanding the 44-hour week. Because Merrheim refused to lead the strikers for anything more radical than a shorter work week, and because he generally withheld Federation and C.G.T. support, the strikes failed. Those who had looked to Merrheim for assistance were shocked that he had abandoned all but the mildest goals of his own workers. Had they been less ignorant of Merrheim's political character, however, they might not have been so surprised.

¹³⁰ For a study of the important strike movement of 1919 see, Nicholas PAPAYANIS, *Masses révolutionnaires et directions réformistes: Les tensions au cours des grèves des métallurgistes français en 1919*, in: *Le Mouvement Social*, octobre-décembre 1975, pp. 51-73.