

Neo- liberalisation and Workers' Resistance

New Reflections on the Trade Union Movements in France

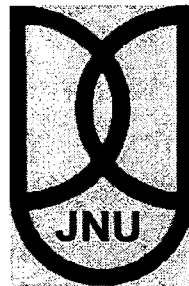
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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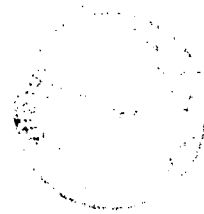
January 5, 2011

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled **Neoliberalisation and Workers Resistance: New Reflections on the Trade Union Movements in France** submitted by me in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Supervisor

***Dedicated to:
Workers of France***

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Mythri. P.U

ABBREVIATIONS

CFDT	(Confédération française démocratique du travail) French Democratic Confederation of Labour
CFTC	(Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens) French Confederation of Christian Workers
CGE	<i>Compagnie Générale d'Electricité</i>
CGT	(Confédération Générale du Travail) General Confederation of Labour
CGT-FO	(Confédération Générale du Travail - Force Ouvrière) General Confederation of Labour - Workers' Force
CGTU	Confédération générale du travail unitaire
EDF	Électricité de France
FNIC- CGT	French Chemical Industry Federation
FSU	Fédération syndicale unitaire
GDF	Gaz de France
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MNC	Multi National Corporation
MRP	(Mouvement Républicain Populaire) Popular Republican Movement

OECD	Organisation For Economic Cooperation and Development
PAYG	Pay- As- You- Go
PCF	(Parti communiste français) French Communist Party
RATP	(Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens) Autonomous Operator of Parisian Transports
RGPP	(Révision Générale des Politiques Publiques) General Review of Public Policies
RPR	(Rassemblement pour la République) Rally for the Republic
SNCF	(Société Nationale des Chemins de fer français) French National Railway Company
SUD	Solidaires Unitaires Démocratiques
TNC	Trans National Corporation
UDF	(Union pour la Démocratie Française) Union for French Democracy
UMP	(Union pour un Mouvement Populaire) Union for a Popular Movement

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Capitalist social transformation from the decays of the Feudalism made tremendous mutations in the course of European historical evolution. This announced the birth of 'Bourgeoisie' and its absolute result, the 'working class'. The highly subdued labourers who had to work 16-18 hours per day without any human considerations had to surrender under the profit accumulation covetousness of 'capital' without any compromise. The inevitable clash between 'Capital and Labour' made considerable stirrings in the nature of European social organism. This paved way for the moulding of a thought- wave among the workers with an accurate ideological back up. The rapidly developing working class was in a need to form a platform for their activities. The Scientific Communist ideas of Karl Marx and Frederic Engels and League of Just¹ joined together for this social necessity which culminated in the formation of the first Trade Union in the world, International Working Mens' Association in 1864. Working class passed through various kinds of threats in all stages of capitalist development. It came in the form of monopoly capitalism and now in the era of imperialism it reached the stage of capital accumulations direct consequence; the increasing 'financialisation' of capital. The deeply rooted economic and socio-political transformation in Europe intensifying the 'labour- capital clash and posing new challenges to the trade union movements. France, the great soil of French revolution and Paris Commune which witnessed the tide of massive trade unions agitations, is also passing through this transformation. The French workers strikes against neoliberal policies could occlude the industries and administrative mechanisms of the country. The present study will focus on the character and course of the French trade union movement after the introduction of neo-liberalism with special emphasis on its ideological currents.

1.1. BACKGROUND

Trade union movement was emanated as a unique coalescence of the amorphous working class mass and the political ideologies which had exquisite influence on the human society. The traditional history of the trade union movement represents the period prior to 1824 as one

¹ Founded in Paris in 1836-1837, the League of just was a secret organization of German political emigrants and itinerant artisans. The League was strongly influenced by Utopian Socialism and Sectarianism.

of the unmitigated persecution and continuous repression (Sidney and Beatrice Webb, 1920). This classical form of labour movement is a product of the 18th century industrial revolution. The vivacity of industrialisation eventually resulted in a consummate change in the existing European social order. This paved way for an overall transformation in the nature of working class in the society. Proletarian transmogrification of the peasants and artisans in the newly emerged labour market as wage labourers was the effect of this process. The severance of common people from the ownership of factors of production was a natural outcome of this change. Capitalist ownership of means of production and their control over all channels of profit created numerous threats and challenges to the industrial proletariat. It was from these miserable backgrounds, the working class attained a sense of solidarity and class-consciousness which provided the substratum for trade union formation. In Europe, the old artisanal centres like Paris, London, Berlin and Leipzig were its main derivation points and all had a rich organisational tradition of medieval craft guilds. Thus trade unionism have since become implanted across the world wherever the phenomena of industrialisation has taken place.

In the 19th and early 20th century, European governmental authorities and the traditional ruling strata viewed various forms of labour class protest almost always as the work of 'agitators', 'conspirators' or preferably 'outsiders'. To the European traditional ruling community, even the idea of trade unionism was unacceptable. However, the hierarchy was not able to prevent the ardent birth of trade unions. European working class movement was highly influenced by the ideologies like Socialism, Brentanoism and some ultra revolutionary sentiments such as Proudhonism, Bakuninism and Anarcho-syndicalism (an expressive form of Anarchism). The extremely rich theoretical content of Karl Marx deeply influenced French labour movement in a considerable way. Marx saw the capitalist system of wage labour and exchange for profit as an overarching, all encompassing structure that breeds exploitative economic relationships among individuals, classes and regions. In the second address of the General Council of the First International (on the Franco-Prussian war) Marx explained the characteristics of the situation of the France and the tasks of the French proletariat. This is vital for an understanding of the subsequent revolutionary events in the country and he international tactics at the time. Marx's enquiry was to find a philosophy to change the world and he could successfully amalgamate the revolutionary ideas with the revolutionary working class. For the ultimate success of the ideas of Communist Manifesto, he completely relies upon the intellectual growth of the working class. The history of manifesto to some extent

reflects the history of the modern working class movement. About the Paris Commune Marx wrote, “with the struggle in Paris the struggle of the working class against the capitalist class and its state has centred upon a new phase. Whatever the immediate outcome may be, a new point of departure of world-wide importance has been gained”.²

Toddler working class organisations in the industrialisation era reached a stage of maturity before the First World War itself through tireless protests according to particular national and social situations. In the words of Walter Kendall, “the labour movement is not a thing in itself but a social organism responding to particular social circumstances. These circumstances differ a great deal between one place to another”.³ Thus the character of the labour movement in each territory finds roots in particular national conditions. The French industrialization was not different from the mainland. Likewise all other parts of Europe, France also witnesses changes in social relations due to the new development. But the response of the French people was unique in each and every sense. These kinds response from the French society was one of determining factor of European social movements till today.

Trade unions in France had stood as the main artery of international working class movement although its history. French trade unions extracted its essence from the French Revolution and Paris Commune (1871). In the words of Lenin, “the thunder of the canon in Paris awakened the most backward sections of the proletariat from their deep slumber, and everywhere gave impetus to the growth of the revolutionary socialist propaganda”.⁴ The commune was led by the world’s first mass revolutionary proletarian organisation, the International Working Men’s Association or the First International. French trade unionism has been a very complex and combative one as compared to its kin in the other parts of the capitalist world. The major reasons for its uniqueness is that the French unions’ demands always have transcended beyond demands for sheer material gains; actually aiming for fundamental changes in the control of the labour process and the entire political economy. Another difference between France and most other advanced capitalist nations is that, the French labour movement is exceptionally weak, as exemplified by its low density and bitter internal divisions. The highly interventionist position of the French state is another factor of its peerless character. The early form of French trade unions could be seen in the Mutual Aid or Friendly Societies and Educational Associations. Proliferated in 1830s, these

² Marx, Karl (1971), *Marx and Engels on the Paris Commune*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP: 285.

³ Walter Kendal (1975), *The Labour Movement in Europe*, London: Penguin Books.pp:20.

⁴ Lenin, V.I (1968), *Lenin Selected works, vol: 14*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, pp: 143.

companionships provided a new impetus and intrinsic strength for all radical working class activities of the French labour.

It was during the July Monarchy that France experienced its first economic modernisations. Textile, coal and metallurgical industries were developed around Lille, Rouen, Mulhouse and Loire basin in St. Estina. During the second empire (1852-70) railway network expanded and more modern mines opened in the North-Eastern part of the country.⁵ The expansion of Paris and other French industrial towns led to a breakdown of municipal services, sewages and health facilities, a high incidence of disease (cholera and typhus) and increases in rates of insanity, infanticide, suicide, beggary, crime and prostitution. The fall of average real wages, high taxation and decline in earnings led the country to food riots and machine smashing.⁶ The absence of social insurance legislation, low wages and corrupt nature of bourgeoisie politics exasperated the working class and gave an invigoration to the trade unions. This was culminated in the formation of CGT (French Trade Union Confederation). In the course of time unions like CFDT (The French Democratic Confederation of Labour), CGT-FO, CGC came into existence. These organisations took many strategic responses to all economic and social situations of the country. During the recession time of 1970s CGT developed relationships with other French trade unions to face the crisis effectively. It took a characteristic mode of action called, “Defensive Unionism”.⁷ In order to address the problems related to the industrial conflicts, they adopted the Matignon and Grenelle model. From 1974 onwards they put forth the slogan, “no to unemployment”, “no to the dismantling of French industry”, “no to redeployment”. CGT was purely a leftist in all sense. At the same time the sociology of CFDT is closely linked to the realities of French Catholicism. CGT and CFDT showed sharp differentiations on the issues like new forms of work organisations but both displayed a radical stance together whenever it needed.

⁵ The bedrock of European modern industrial society was laid in the years between 1850 and 1870. France in these years witnessed a jump in railway mileage from 1900 to 11,500. Production in the French Pas- de- Calais field rose from 4700 tonnes to 2,200,000. Countries national economy also witnessed a production increase from 4,400,000 to 13,300,000 tonnes

⁶ Incidents of machine smashing were common in France in the first half of the 19th century. In Lille workers petitioned their government for legislation against the introduction of machinery. One slogan heard in the French Revolution of 1980 was ‘down with the machine’. Major centres of machine smashing were Vienne, St. Estine, Paris, Bordeaux and Toulouse.

⁷ By the 1960s CGT had settled into a characteristic mode of action in the labour market. Under this ‘defensive unionism’, the con federation together with its federations and their local components deployed their labour market resources through agitation and striking to generate bread and butter material gains for the CGTs base, mainly the higher paid workers. In this mode CGT assumed no responsibility whatever for the broader economic implications of its action.

Diverse experiences acquired by the French people through two world wars and economic depressions played an extremely important role in moulding the character of French industrial politics. Bitter consequences of this turmoil have provided a unique kind of industrial landscape to France. A mass-based labour movement with the presence of an always interventionist state was the ultimate result of this historical evolution.

One of the most prominent characteristic of French trade unionism is its involvement in militant kind of strikes. A slow pace of industrialization is considered as an important reason for workers radicalism in the post-war era. Richard Hamilton in his study of "Affluent workers" in the Fourth Republic argues that organisations rather than social conditions made people radical. The importance of strikes in France can be determined from three indicators the annual number of conflicts; the number of workers involved and the number of days lost due to strikes. The average annual number of conflicts between 1970-80 was approximately 3500 with a minimum of 3104 in 1979 and a maximum of 4350 in 1971. The number of strike participants in this ten year period has varied from 501,000 in 1980 to 3,814,000 in 1976. The number of man days lost to strikes during this period has oscillated between 1,700,000 in 1980 and 5,000,000 in 1976⁸.

In 1981 French people rejected the right wing and brought to power a left government after a prolonged period of twenty years. This government provided a representative mechanism and new rights for workers and unions. The 'Auroux Reform' of the government could initiate a fundamental change in industrial relations legislation.⁹ The law also provided the workers at least six hours a year of release time to discuss working conditions. By a series of legislatively authorised decrees the government regulated the situation of part time workers, temporary workers and the other workers not enjoying the legal benefits of full-time, permanent status. All these regulations could pacify the pungent political climate of France to a large extent.

It was in this specific juncture the global imperialist agenda of liberalisation reached to the French soil. During the years from 1945 to 1958, French leaders and intellectuals vigorously rejected private capitalism and the market economy. Till 1970 Keynesianism constituted the

⁸ Keeselman, Mark (1984), *The French workers' movement: Economic crisis and political change*, London: George Allen and Unwin, PP: 36.

⁹ Auroux Reform provided protection for unions, particularly at the plant level, and encouraged labour and other representative mechanisms to articulate workers' grievances and managed industrial conflict'. Shop stewards receive additional release time to conduct union business, and they gain the right to receive subsidized economic training. Auroux reforms also introduced an economic commission to assist the work committee in large plants.

dominant paradigm for understanding the determination of economic activity. When the world economy entered into a 'structural crisis' during the 1970s because of the first oil shock, cumulative inflation, diminished growth rate and a wave of unemployment became its main aspects. The new social order called neo-liberalism emerged in this background and it gradually conquered most of the economies. The sowing of liberalisation policies once again sharply glowed the trade union movements of France. Trade unionists and progressive policy-makers have long warned that, the spread of globalization will mean the demise of hard-won labour standards and workplace rights in the Western world. Labour organisations are of the opinion that liberalisation not only undermining domestic labour standards directly, it also doing so indirectly by undermining the strength of domestic labour organisations. The neoliberal policies of the last three decades have had important consequences for the trade union movement. Unemployment came to be seen as a necessary price for the restabilisation of capitalist economies. The inevitable accompaniment of this shift came in the form of a wholesale attack on labour organisations. International economic policies dominated by "Washington consensus" attacked trade unions and labour market protections.

Available studies and datas are showing the intensity of this problem. William Cooke's detailed study of 19 OECD countries state that, the FDI by USA in these countries between 1982-1993 negatively affected the levels of unionisation and protective labour legislation. In a similar vein, Richard Freeman and Ana Reganga found that increased trade between the United States and less developed countries between 1970 and 1992 led to significant reduction both in employment levels and wages for low skilled workers in the United States. Laura Tyson and Bill Cline have concluded that trade is responsible for somewhere between 20 and 53% of the increase in income inequality in the U.S.

In this situation, workers all over the world started large scale protest against the neoliberal policies. Now the trade unions found that their bargaining power increasingly weakened because of these agendas. The anti-globalisation movement resumed its forceful march by strong mobilisation at the EU Summit in Barcelona, WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle and G-8 meeting in Genoa. Labour strikes in France at the end of 1995, which were aimed at reversing the French government's efforts to bring its budget in line with the Maastricht criteria, threw the country to its worst crisis since 1968. On January 29th more that 2.5 billion people protested in the streets of Paris to protect their rights. They called the day as "Black Thursday" by saying that, 'government had done too much to help the TNC and MNCs. A large majority of French working class viewed the institutional reforms of the European

Union constitution as a deliberative attempt to consolidate the liberal policies and their opposition came in the form of a 'NO Vote' in the French referendum.

1.2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the work *On Trade unionism, A collection of articles and speeches* (1970), Lenin presents a profound Marxist analysis of the main problems of working class and trade unions. In analysing every aspect of the developing revolutionary struggle of the proletariat in Western Europe, Russia and the United States, Lenin always proceeded from the concrete historical situation, from the general and specific socio- economic conditions existing in the given country. He wrote "the spontaneous working- class movement is trade unionism ... and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie". Lenin regarded the development and strengthening of revolutionary awareness in the workers as the necessary condition for a further successful upsurge of the proletariats movement and its transition to the next and higher stage. In his opinion, 'conscious political struggle is what fits the proletariat for the role of the revolutionary vanguard of the working people, putting it in the lead even at the stage of the bourgeois-democratic revolution'. Lenin through the speeches always emphasised the necessity to combine the political and the economic forms of the working-class movement and drew attention to their indissoluble connection. Lenin ruthlessly exposed the treacherous activities of the trade union bureaucrats and bourgeois politicians of the Labourite stripe in the international workers' movement and also gave much attention to the problem of overcoming anarchist and anarcho- syndicalist tendencies in it.

The book *The French Workers' Movement: Economic crisis and political change* (1984) edited by Mark Kesselman and Guy Groux aims to describe and analyse the French labour movement during the critically important period of 1970s. It seeks to analyse the background and complexities of the situation created by the left parties victory in 1981. Most of the authors agree on one point that the gap has increased between the labour movements innovations in the realm of ideology and practice. They state that "while unions have forged daring new programmatic approaches, they have been less successful in developing appropriate new forms of struggle which adequately reflect their ideological adaptations". The book addresses the questions like, 'Have trade unions succeeded in developing new organisational capacity and vision adequate to the new situation'? 'To what extent have they represented the new demands and issues emerging at this time'? All the essays in the volume

provides a coherent and comprehensive analysis of the history of the trade union movement, focusing on the constraints and opportunities created by the economic crisis of the 70s and the political change ushered in by the Socialist party's victory.

The book, *The rise of neoliberalism in advanced capitalist economies, A material analysis* written by M.C. Howard and J.E. King explained neoliberalism in advanced capitalism on the basis of historical materialism. One theme which runs through the book is that, neoliberalism is not a rebirth of classical liberalism but is a genuine successor of the 'mixed economy' that prevailed for over 30 years after world war second. It states, "all changes in economic and political relations that characterise neoliberalism, including the development of globalisation and new right politics, the privatisation and deregulation of economic activity, the decline of unions and transformation of left political parties and the restructuring of welfare programmes and taxation systems, forms a loop of causation in which each component tends to reinforce the others". The book raised the question, why the loop of institutional interdependence takes a neoliberal form rather than a form of another kind? It argues, the deregulation of finance is the weakest link in all of neoliberalism and any serious crisis here will certainly endanger a political reversal.

Richard Hyman (1997) in his article *Trade Unions and European Integration* discusses the role of trade unions in the process of European economic integration. Author states that "European experience is distinctive in that the creation of a free-trade area has occurred within a supranational political and institutional framework, which had offered scope for European wide regulation of market forces". Labour movements, organised within the European Trade Union Confederation, have attempted to influence the construction of a 'social dimension' to economic integration. This article discusses reasons for their limited success and considers whether the obstacles can be better overcome in the future. He explains the role of trade unions in the EU social policy, the prospects of future trade union influence within the EU, and the more general implications of European experience. He addresses the question of "can labour movements develop the international solidarity essential to countering the strategic might of transnational capital and the anarchic and destructive force of global markets?"

Chriss Howell (2009) in the article *The Transformation of French Industrial Relations: Labour Representation and the State in a Post-Dirigiste era* argues that a fundamental transformation took place in the regulation of class relations in France. This article explores two paradoxes of this transformation. First, a dense network of institutions of social dialogue

and worker representation has become implanted in French firms at the same time as trade union strength has declined. Second, the transformation has involved a relaxation of centralized labour market regulation on the part of the state, yet the French state remains a central actor in the reconstruction of the industrial relations system. Thus the state, “Institutional reform of industrial relations could not take place without the active intervention of the state because employers and trade unions alone were unable to create durable industrial relations institutions. The collapse of trade unionism meant the need for new actors on the labour side and only the state could both create and confer legitimacy upon those new actors”.

Susan Milner (2001) through the article *Globalisation and employment in France: between flexibility and protection* examines the extent to which employment, particularly manufacturing employment, has been ‘hollowed out’ as a result of internationalisation Strategies of leading French multinationals. It finds evidence of a shift to overseas employment, but notes the complexity of globalising trends which make it difficult to interpret them solely in terms of competition for lower labour costs. However, globalisation has shifted power decisively towards business and away from labour and the state. As a result, the state has found it difficult to steer between protection of labour and the promotion of flexibility in a relatively strictly regulated economy. She argues that ‘State interventionism in social policy has been both a response to and an instrument of economic restructuring’.

Philippe Couton (2004) in the article *A labour of laws: Courts and the mobilisation of French workers* attempts to analyse the prominent role played by the labour courts, one of France’s oldest and most influential labour institutions, in moulding the nature of French labour movements. He stressed on the point that, ‘the French labour has retained a high level of mobilizing and institutional power but it is yet among the weakest in the industrialised world’. Author views this unusual position of labour is partly due to the historical role of labour courts. Based on a range of historical and contemporary evidence, this article shows that the involvement of the state and labour in these courts over the past two centuries has played a crucial role in the evolution of French industrial relations. His assertion is that, “ this process unfolded along three main dimensions: the early establishment of labour courts strongly and durably influenced the mobilization patterns of the emergent labour movement, France’s labour relations model was largely inspired by the judicialism embedded in labour courts, and a combination of more contingent events led to the emergence of a problematic

notion of union “representativeness”. Thus he reached the conclusion that these patterns have contributed to shape French labour into its present condition of both weakness and strength.

Edmund Heery (2005) through the article *Sources of change in trade unions* argued widely that if trade unions are to experience renewal then they must invest in organizing the unorganized and align their strategies of interest representation with the needs of women and those in atypical employment. This article examines the groups and factors internal and external to trade unions that encourage representatives to engage in both types of activity. Drawing on a large survey of union paid officers in Britain, it identifies those internal and external pressures that encourage change and uses these data to comment on current theories of change in trade unions. He presented a systematic survey data on the main pressures for change experienced by a key group of union representatives and paid officers engaged in organizing and collective bargaining.

Alfred Braunthal (1957) explains the importance of political freedom for union work in the article titled *Economic and Social aspects of International Trade Union work*. Viewing social and economic activities are the primary concern of trade unions; author urges the trade unions to fight against dictatorship and to support the democratic movements. “International trade union work knows no geographical boundaries, but its character is influenced by the stage of economic and social development of a region”. He tries to explain this argument by stressing on two types of economies. In industrially advanced countries trade union encourages and strives to maintain policies of full employment and full share by labour in resulting benefits of a stable economy. At the same time in underdeveloped countries, where trade union movement has just begun, it seeks to help in economic and social development geared to needs.

1.3. Rationale and Scope of study

France, a country with a rich history and experience of political and social movements stood as a rejuvenator for the outside world for a long time. It provided a new impetus and intrinsic strength both politically and ideologically for the people who wished an onwardness of the society. The ideologies which gave birth to many new social movements emerged from the French soil but it could not make any notable change in the organised protest nature of France. When the rest of European ideological and practical arena was undergoing transformation, France was on the whirling wheel of old social movement’s ideological

nucleus. The only change took place in French trade unions in the post war era was its reversal from the leading position of Mediterranean syndicalism. When globalisation began to shift the power decisively from labour and state, the workers began to suffer what is termed as the process of 'social dumping'. The French worker has been hollowed out as a result of internationalisation strategies of leading French multinationals. The comparatively calm social atmosphere of the then France suddenly witnessed a vibrant and violent struggle of workers and students. This agitation could give a strong rebuff to the imperialist established notion of "there is no alternative" to globalisation. Hence it is vital to enquire the nature and course of the French labour movement in the liberalisation era. The present study will focus on the transformed political character of the French state and its response to the social tensions. It will also check the question of whether the socialist ideas are still relevant in determining the social and political movement in France in particular and Europe in general. It seeks to analyse the extent of neoliberal French state's policy influence on the Trade unions.

1.4. Research Questions

- What are the major ideological debates and intellectual currents in the French trade union movement with regard to neoliberalism?
- To what extent various intellectual interference has made an impact upon organisational behaviour and tactics of the trade unions?
- What are the new challenges which trade union movements are facing in a liberalised French society in relation to work?
- How far the changing scenario of French political economy has been reflected on the trajectory of the trade union movement?
- How far the Trade Union Movements succeeded in coping up with the problems of neo-liberal economic policies?

1.5. Hypothesis

The neoliberal policies in France triggered off a new wave of workers agitation. The forms of agitation resulted in shaping current against the neoliberal political and economic philosophy.

The new forms and expressions of Socialist philosophy have started to take shape in this process. The rejuvenated struggles of workers compelled the government to negotiate with the workers.

1.6. Methodology

The study, titled *Neoliberalisation and workers resistance: New reflections on the Trade union movement in France*, deals with a theoretical analysis of all major ideologies from the period of industrial revolution to globalisation. A plentiful literature on trade union theories by Marxist and Anarcho-Syndicalist thinkers were widely used for shaping this study. Writings of Karl Marx, Frederic Engels, V.I. Lenin, Proudhon and Bakunin also used to make a thorough theoretical understanding. A vast number of primary sources provided the information about the subject matter. Public speeches of the union leaders, pamphlets, and policy documents produced by trade unions, letters, records of interviews, press releases and French government records were used for this study. It also relied upon the secondary sources like books, journal articles, seminar papers, research papers and discussion documents. Annual report of the organisations like OECD, International Labour Organisation, and European Trade Union Confederation etc: - are also some sources used for the research.

1.7. Outline of the Study

The proposed study titled “*Neoliberalisation and workers resistance: New reflections on Trade Union Movements in France*” contains total 5 chapters.

Chapter I- Introduction: This chapter sets the background for the research and will study the history of the trade union and liberalisation policies in France. An analysis of the scope of the present study and a review of the selected literature relating to the subject is being made. Also the research questions addressed, the hypotheses advanced by the study and the research methods applied are enumerated in this chapter.

Chapter II- A Brief History of Discourse on Trade Theories and Praxis: This chapter made an analysis of various theories, which gave ideological backbone to the French Trade Unions. It mainly focused on the role and influence of various philosophies like Socialism, Anarchism and neo-liberalism in moulding and developing the character of the trade unions.

Chapter III-: Emergence, Mobilisation and Political Interventions of French Trade Unions: The chapter examined the emergence and development of French trade unions from a passive and exploited mass into a conscious and politically independent social force. The strategies adopted by unions towards the French political and economic situations and its prominence as a leading trade union in the world also studied detail in this chapter. For this purpose a historical approach is used in order to understand and contextualise the French Trade Union movement.

Chapter IV- Responses through Resistance: French Workers in the Era of Neoliberalisation: By critically approaching the economic changes took place in France in 1980s, the chapter focused on the new challenges raised by neoliberalisation against the rights and security of the French working class. It made a detailed study of why, how and for what the trade unions are waging continuous struggle against the elements of globalisation.

Chapter V- Conclusion: The major findings and arguments of the study are summarised in this chapter. The chapter would also attempt to raise pertinent issues and important questions to be taken up for further research.

CHAPTER 2
A BRIEF HISTORY OF DISCOURSE ON TRADE UNION:
THEORIES AND PRACTICES

CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DISCOURSE ON TRADE UNION:

THEORIES AND PRAXIS

2.1. Introduction

Extremely combative, complex and militant French trade union movement had stood as an artery of international working class struggles from its very toddler stage. These unions always analysed the political budes and tensions of the country through a workers perspective and created equilibrium for the impartial onward march of the society. France, the classical upholder of liberty, equality and fraternity with a rich heritage of French Revolution and Paris Commune always adopted an opulent theoretical base for the practicability of trade union movements for a fruitful result. By extracting essence from the theories that shook the world ideological realm, the French workers contributed much to the industrial stability of the country. The ideologically shaped working class movements with an unprecedented massiveness and comprehensiveness are not only a peculiarity of France. It has a deeply rooted Pan- European historical background and characteristic feature. By comparing and contrasting the workers movements bursted in other European countries, America and Australia; France enriched is own trade union national culture with an international perspective. European continent witnessed the germination of modern trade union movement with the Feudal decline and its resultant bourgeoisie economic dominance. New social structures and economic litigations began to define the workers consciousness and there emerged the theoretical discourses to give a sufficient answer to the working class.

2.2. Industrial Revolution and Working Class consciousness.

Organised movements with strong ideological backbone emanated in a peculiar milieu, where the class differentiations reached its zenith and majority of the human beings became a mere element of the production process. Class struggles are taking birth from a class divided societies productive system. "The whole history of modern industry shows that capital, if not checked, will recklessly and ruthlessly work to cast down the whole working class to the

utmost state of degradation".¹⁰ Such a consciousness blossomed in the 18th century European socio- economic realm in a particular historical juncture, namely the Industrial Revolution era. 'Capital' is the sinew of an industrialized society and it has certain instinctual inclinations.¹¹ Material factors of the capital from its embryonic stage installed the society in two distinct ledges. With the very first stirrings of industrial revolution, the inherent nature of the new production process began to determine the undercurrents of the economy. Its vivacity eventually resulted in a consummate change in the working class structure of the western society. Britain stood as its derivation point and its repercussions could shake the French, German and Belgian economies in a considerable manner.

The advent of industrialisation witnessed the proletarian transmogrification¹² of the peasants and artisans as wage labourers in the newly emerged urban factories. Capital wire-pulling provided maximum profit to industrial bourgeoisie and extreme insolvency to the real producers of wealth. The insatiable appetites of capital stressed the contradiction between the logic of market and working class life. Production relations became the artery of the newly emerged Western European industrial society which in the course of time led Europe to more flagrant social conflicts. The hiatus between factory proletariat and urban industrial bourgeoisie¹³ was increasing day by day. "The vast expansion of old modes of production,

¹⁰Marx, Karl (1969), *Selected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP: 70.

¹¹Capital is an accumulation of money and cannot make its appearance in history until the circulation of commodities has given rise to the money relation. In other words capital is money, which is used to buy something only in order to sell it again. It is not just wealth, but wealth in a historically developed form. The contradiction within the capital is that – it arises only in and through the exchange of the commodities, but on average commodities are exchanged at their value, so no new value can arise simply by the exchange of commodities for one another. So neither the purchase nor the sale can realize a new value. In order to expand, capital must purchase a commodity, the consumption of which creates new value. Conflicts also exist within the capital. As change takes place in the productive forces, capital flows from one industry to another generating political conflicts between the various sections of capital. Thus changes in capital are important in understanding conflicts which broke out from time to time on the surface in the form of political and social movements and social change generally. One of the most important of these conflicts which arise from the dynamics of capital is the way big capital constantly drives smaller competitors to the wall. The resulting concentration of capital was seen by Marx as one of the main axes along which capital would eventually arrive at a historical crisis, with a handful of immensely wealthy capitalists confronted by a vast mass of proletarians, with nothing in between. Marx showed that capital is a social relation and for the bourgeoisie social relations are a form of capital.

¹²The process of proletarianisation is a part of capital accumulation. The growth of capital will lead to the growth of working class. The expansion of capitalist market involved process of primitive accumulation and privatisation, which transferred more and more assets into capitalist private property, and concentrated wealth in few hands. There for, an increasing mass of the population was reduced to dependence on wage labour for income. In Marxian theory proletarianisation is often seen as the most important form of downward social mobility.

¹³Bourgeoisie is originally the name for the inhabitants of walled towns in medieval France. In Marx's theory of class struggle the bourgeoisie plays a significant role. By overthrowing the feudal system it is seen as an originally progressive force that later becomes a reactionary force as it tries to prevent the ascendancy of the proletariat in order to maintain its own position of predominance. In the work, 'Class struggle in France' Marx states that the development of industrial proletariat is conditioned by the development of industrial

the dissolution of the legal basis of regulating conditions of production, and the appearance of new modes like the factory, threatened to dissolve the delicate balance of those 'fields of force' that had reserved the curious social stability of eighteenth century society".¹⁴ The physical nature of the work, the earning received for it and living standards were not at all melliphirous as well as highly contradictory. When a minority was fattened with affluence, the large majority was facing abrasive inhumanity. Parlous living conditions initially provided a kind of trepidation to workers. In the early 1850s deaths in Oldham from tuberculosis, the characteristic disease of overwork, were more than double the national average of England.¹⁵ A large number of artisans, peasants and shop keepers, who were unacceptable to the new industry, were throwing away to the drainages of the newly emerged urban centers. High accident rates and deterioration of social security led the workers to start umpteen protests through collective organisations. As Erric Hobsbawm has put it "nothing was more inevitable in the first half of the 19th century than the appearance of labour and socialist movements, and indeed of mass social revolutionary unrest".¹⁶

The thirsty for proletarian emancipation cannot be fulfilled within capitalist order was a historical reality realised by the lower stratum of society through experiences. This reality converted the class struggle into a political struggle. Trade union gave the workers a practical way with an intrinsic strength through a scientific and ideological substratum. For the revolutionary remodeling of the society through a destruction of the existing exploitation, the working class adopted distinct scrupulous union strategies. As Engels quoted, "in all branches of industry trade unions were formed with the outspoken intention of protecting the single working man against the tyranny and neglect of the bourgeoisie".¹⁷ The revolts broke out in Manchester mills in 1819, spinning workers revolts in Leons, Selicia and Bohemia in 1831 and 1844 raised barricades against the industrial working conditions.

Organised movement of the modern working class was ignited by the political philosophies created with perspicacious class understandings. By amplifying the logic of the development of nature, these ideologies connected the activities of humanity in a scientific way. Marxism rank among the most prominent in the theoretical heritage regarding working class.

bourgeoisie. In his opinion the destruction of the feudalism by bourgeoisie is making the ground for a proletarian revolution.

¹⁴Price, Richard (1986), *Labour in British society, An interpretative history*, London: Croom Helm Ltd, PP: 49.

¹⁵ Foster, John (1974), *Class struggle and the industrial revolution*, London: Weisedfeld and Nicolson, PP:

¹⁶Hobsbawm, Erric,J (1962), *The age of revolution, Europe 1789-1848*, Britain: Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd, PP:250.

¹⁷ Engels, Frederick (1977), *The condition of working class in England*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP: 502.

“Marxism armed the working class with a revolutionary theory and gave a socialist orientation to the labour movement, which had hitherto developed spontaneously”.¹⁸ It placed ‘working class’ in a most prominent place. Marxism argues that, freedom of the working people from exploitation is the foremost freedom and it views working class as the grave-digger of capitalism and the creator of a communist society¹⁹. Marx showed that, “the basis of social life is material production, that historical changes take place primarily as a result of changes in production, and that the workers and peasants, who are the most important productive force in society and who create material wealth, are the real makers of history”.²⁰

The Manifesto of the Communist Party contains the first and most complete summarised statement of the theoretical principle of Marxism and of the strategy and tactics of communism. It states, “the history of all societies since the break-up of the primitive communes has been the history of class struggles”.²¹ The concept of class was not a discovery of the Marxists. Bourgeois Historians and economists already described about the existence of class long before. Marx was only trying to prove that, 1) “The existence of classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production, 2) The class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat and 3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society”.²² Marx comprehensively explained the dialectical interconnection between the objective and subjective factors in the class struggle. It views bourgeoisie society as a product emerged from the remnants’ of feudal social order which could not solve the class conflicts. It states, the proletariat “with its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie”.²³ Manifesto declares that, communists have no interests apart from those of the working class as a whole. It was in the proletariat that Marxism found its material social base.

Marxian ideology upholds the spirit of proletarian internationalism.²⁴ Its theoreticians stressed on the point that, the character of capital is international. In order to fight against such a

¹⁸ Iskrov, M.V (1970), *Lenin on the historical role of the working class*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP: 249.

¹⁹ Bourgeoisie is its own grave diggers in the sense that, capital accumulation brings about industrial concentration, which in turn brings about the combination of workers with low wages, which struggles to overthrow private property to put an end to their enslavement.

²⁰ Suslov, M.A (1975), *Marxism- Leninism, The international teaching of the working class*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP: 5.

²¹ Karl, Marx and Frederik Engels (1973), *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP: 34.

²² Karl, Marx and Frederik Engels (1965), *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP:69

²³ Karl, Marx and Frederik Engels (1973), *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP:

²⁴ Internationalism is the ethical value of the workers’ movements towards the interests of the working class of all countries over and above the interests of the working class in any one country, and the practice of organising on

borderless thing the proletariats also should break the borders of nationalities. "It is a theory of the dictatorship of proletariat as a special form of the class alliance between the proletariat and all exploited people of non- proletarian and semi- proletarian origin".²⁵ Anti- capitalist struggles in Europe and United States got a new dimension with the establishment of World's first mass revolutionary proletarian organisation, the International Working Men's Association or the First International. Its intention was the replacement of socialist or semi-socialist sect for an organised working class struggle. In the first eight years, the International could make an organisational unification of the international working class movement and gave right and authentic leadership to various socio-political problems of the workers. The Communist International also became a venue for the workers of different European countries in solving their confusions and fights against various revisionist tendencies which had some kind of influence in them. Marx dreamed the springing up of a new society, "whose international rule will be peace, because its national ruler will be everywhere the same- 'Labour' and the pioneer of that new society is the International Working Men's Association".²⁶ It succeeded in raising the most advanced workers in its rank from spontaneous actions and an instinctive feeling of class brotherhood to awareness of the need for international solidarity and unity of action by the proletariat as a whole. This gradually led to the formation of Second International (1889-1914) and Third International (1919-1943). According to Antonio Gramsci, "The communist international is not a bureaucratic office of leaders of the masses, but the historical conscience of the masses embodied in the vast and multiform movement of the whole international proletariat".²⁷

French political and economic studies of Marx and Engels clearly demonstrate the application of historical materialistic method in analysing the events. In the second address on the Franco – Prussian war, Marx urged the French workers to strengthen their class organisation. The proclamation of Paris Commune, a highest form of proletarian democracy, was an epoch making in the history of world revolutionary movement and is regarded as the brain child of the International. Marx developed the theory of state, the revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat on the basis of the experience of the Paris Commune. "This was the first

an international basis. Internationalism is not only a natural manifestation of proletarian solidarity and brotherhood, but a real policy that serves the general cause of revolution. For this reason genuine internationalism also find its expression in the support of all the fraternal parties for the existing socialist society and in the assistance rendered by the socialist countries to the world communist movement.

²⁵ Iskov, M.V (1970), *Lenin on the historical role of the working class*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP:249.

²⁶ Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederic (1986), *Collected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP: 7

²⁷ Gramsci, Antonio (1972), *For the Communist International*, Issac Bernards (eds) *Marxism- Leninism on proletarian Internationalism*, Moscow: Progress Publishers.

revolution in which the working class was openly acknowledged as the only class capable of social initiative".²⁸ Marx analysed the historical conditions and causes for the emergence of the commune, and exposed the "national betrayal" of the French bourgeoisie, which surrendered to the foreign invader in order to suppress the revolutionary proletariat. Marx analysed the communes' social and political measures and its policy making documents and proved that the proletarian state had acted, not only in the interests of the working class, but also of the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie. By studying the experiences of the commune, Marx wrote, 'The civil war in France',²⁹ which examines the origin and development of the state superstructure of capitalism, the dialectical interaction between superstructure and the economic base, the role of bourgeoisie state as an instrument of the oppression of the working people and the capitalist relations of production. Thus Marx stated, "if the Commune was thus the true representative of all the healthy elements of French society, and therefore the truly national government, it was, at the same time, as a working men's government, as the bold champion of the emancipation of labour, emphatically international".³⁰

Lenin's rich theoretical legacy on the working class and trade union movement occupying a prominent place in the Marxian literature. The theory of socialist revolution has been profoundly and comprehensively elaborated by Lenin. In analysing every aspect of the developing revolutionary struggle of the proletariat in Russia, Western Europe and the United States, Lenin always proceeded from the concrete historical situation, from the general and specific socio economic conditions existing in the given country. Lenin always emphasised the necessity to combine the political and economic forms of the working class movement and drew attention to their indissoluble connection. Lenin wrote' " the working class movement only then grows out of its embryonic stage, its infancy, and becomes a class movement when it makes transition to the political struggle. Conscious political struggle is what fits the proletariat for the role of the revolutionary vanguard of the working people, putting it in the lead even at the stage of the bourgeoisie- democratic revolution".³¹ He always

²⁸Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederic (1986), *Collected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP: 336.

²⁹The civil war in France analyses the historical conditions of the origin of the Paris Commune. It is written in the form of an address of the General Council to all members of the International in Europe and the United States of America. It was published as an official document of the International Working Men's association a fortnight after the defeat of the Commune and became widely known in various countries. In this Marx poses the problem of the period of transition from capitalism to socialism. Marx demonstrated a dialectical and concrete historical approach, a differentiated attitude to the various elements of the state machine.

³⁰Marx, Karl (1971), *The civil war in France*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, Pp: 79.

³¹Lenin, V.I (1970), *On trade unions*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP: 15.

emphasised the necessity to combine the political and the economic forms of the working class movement and drew attention to their indissoluble connection.

Marxian scientific enquiries state that the value of labour is a variable magnitude.³² In 'The political economy of labour', writings dating from the years 1863-1881, Marx and Engels examine primarily the role of trade unions in determining wage rates. All through the history of capitalism, it always has had a tendency to decrease the wages and extend the working days. Through the sale of labor power, the worker in a capitalist society becoming "a mere machine for producing foreign wealth, broken in body and brutalized in mind".³³ In various periodical cycles of capitalist production such as a state of quiescence, prosperity, over trade, crisis, growing animation and stagnation, the market price of the commodities are regulated by their values. But even in the period of extra profit the workers are not able to receive an average wage for his labour. This basic contradiction is the root cause of the struggle between capital and labour.

Lenin ruthlessly exposed the treacherous activities of the trade union bureaucrats and bourgeoisie politicians of the labourite stripe in the international workers' movement, emphasizing that their loud talk of socialism is a mere screen for their bourgeoisie labour policy. Lenin states that, contact with the masses that is with the overwhelming majority of the workers is the most important and most fundamental condition for the success of all trade union activity. He wrote, "besides extensively participating in organising the socialist economy, the trade unions are also called upon to overcome by stubborn, persistent, more extensive educational and organisational work the prejudices of certain petty bourgeoisie section of proletariat and semi proletariat. The unions should steadily extend the insufficiency wide base of the soviet government and find new organisational forms of enlisting the entire population in building socialism".³⁴

Lenin says, trade unions tasks includes; increasing labour productivity, raising the people's cultural standards, training new personal for socialist industry and so on. They were to play the role of main link between the party and the rest of the working population. He is of the opinion that, general success in building socialism depended to a great extent on correctly established relations between the party and trade unions. The Fifth All Russia Conference of

³²In Marxian view point, the value of labouring power is formed by two elements-namely physical and historical or social. It also determined by a particular countries' standard of life. By comparing the standard of wages in different historical epochs Marx came to the conclusion that, values of all other commodities are remaining constant but the nature of labour value is fixed.

³³Marx, Karl (1969), *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP:67

³⁴ Ibid, PP: 23.

the Trade Unions, held from November 2 to 6, 1920 directed that, the trade unions should carry out mainly organisational economic and educational work. Consolidation of democratic principles, production propaganda, introduction of bonuses in kind, institution of disciplinary courts to deal with offenders against labour discipline, inculcation of a Statesmanlike attitude to production – such was the work the trade union were to organise on a national scale.

Leninism considering the “governmentalisation of trade unions as a severe threat to the stability of proletarian supremacy.”³⁵ Thus he made the conclusion that, “ being a school of communism in general, the trade unions must, in particular, be a school for training the whole mass of workers, and eventually all working people, in the art of managing socialist industry(and gradually also agriculture)”.³⁶

TH-18874
Leon Trotsky fought rigorously against the restoration of democratic norms in trade union activity and tried to turn the trade unions into an instrument for “militarising labour”³⁷. He advanced the slogans of ‘tightening the screws and introducing barracks discipline at factories. Trotsky categorically denied the role of the trade unions in protecting the material and spiritual interest of the working class, defended the principle of egalitarian distribution and belittled the significance of material incentives in raising labour productivity. Lenin resolutely opposed Trotsky’s slogans and viewed it as a typical bureaucratic distortion that could have grave political consequences. Lenin states that the political party should be capable of uniting, training and organising a vanguard of the proletariat and of the whole mass of the working people that alone will be capable of withstanding the inevitable petty-bourgeoisie vacillations of this mass and the inevitable tradition and relapses of narrow craft unionism or craft prejudices among the proletariat. In ‘Draft and explanation for a programme for the Social- Democratic Party’ Lenin States’ “the struggle of the working class against the capitalist class is a struggle against all classes who live by the labour of others and against all exploitation. It can only end in the passage of political power into the hands of the working class”.³⁸

By authentically defining the different aspects of the labour, wage, strike, internationalism, and revolution ,Marx, Engels and later Lenin enriched the theories of scientific communism.

³⁵ Lenin wrote that, governmentalisation of trade unions would leave them no chance to fulfil the important function of ‘non class economic struggle’ that is, to protect the material and spiritual interests of the working people and fight bureaucratic distortions.

³⁶ Lenin, V.I (1970), *On trade unions*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP: 27.

³⁷ Trotsky was the main proponent of the idea of militarization of labour. By using this phrase (militarization of labour) what he was intended to propose a democratically-run army, made up of and run by workers

³⁸ Lenin, V.I (1970), *On trade unions*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, PP: 32.



Marx's and Engels' general theory of trade unionism contains three major elements. Firstly, they considered trade union struggle as a necessary thing. The notion that, trade unions are an inevitable outcome of the rise of industry and the growth of working class, achieving for the later at least a minimal degree of protection from the oppressive and arbitrary encroachments of the capitalist. Secondly, they showed that this struggle is an essential precondition for any political transformation that the workers must initiate. Failure to wage this basic struggle would indicate, they thought, that the working class was as incapable of its self emancipation. Finally, they held that strikes and trade unions alone are insufficient to abolish the root cause of the workers distress, the labour capital relation, and their aims and defend all societies oppressed, the unions risked degenerating into almost reactionary enclaves of privilege, upholding the division of working class and hampering its progress that without efforts to broaden.

The immense historical part played by Marx and Engels in molding modern labour movements is unique. Their contributions offered the working class movement scientifically grounded guidelines and proposed an overall solution to both the national and international problems facing the proletariat. Without the theoretical foundations laid by them, a mass socialist movement would have been impossible. Marxian ideologies succeeded in defending the idea of the revolutionary role of the trade unions against Proudhonism, Anarcho Syndicalism, Lassalleanism, Narrow craft unionism, Economism and other manifestations of opportunism in the trade union movement. All these movements demanded the unconditional realisation of freedom, both subjectively and objectively, equally in political and economic life.

2.3. Ultra-Revolutionary approaches of Trade unions.

Anarchism is "the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government - harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being".³⁹

³⁹ Kropotkin, Piotr (1905), "Anarchism", [Online: Web] Accessed 2 August 2009 URL: <http://www.panarchy.org/kropotkin/1905.eng.html>

Anarchy in its ideal sense is a perfect, unfettered self government of the individual and consequently the absence of any kind of external government. Anarchism extended the liberal doctrine of *laissez faire* to all human actions, and recognised nothing but a free convention or agreement as the only permissible form of human society.⁴⁰ It demands the unconditional realisation of freedom both subjectively and objectively, equally in economic and political life. Anarchy is regarded as “underlying society as the ideal state of nature; every form of society is only a consequence of the degeneration of mankind or at a rate, only a voluntary renunciation of the original, inalienable and unalterable rights of man and nature, the chief of which is freedom”.⁴¹

Pierrre Joseph Proudhon, the father of anarchism made the ominous comment, “property is theft”.⁴²In the classic work ‘The system of economic contradiction: The philosophy of misery’, Proudhon tells that, labour is the principle of wealth and the power which creates or abolishes value, or places them in proportion to one another and also distributes them. Thus in his view labour itself is a force that makes for equilibrium and productivity. He suggests, in order to work, the labour must define and determine itself- that is organise itself. Prodhonism explains, “labour gains by its division ore than natural fertility, but at the same time, this divided labour, which debases the workman, sinks, owing to the manner in which this division is carried out, with great rapidity below its own level, and only creates an insufficient value. After it has increased consumption by the superfluity of products, it leaves the worker in the lurch owing to the low rate of pay; instead of keeping off want it actually produces it”.⁴³ According to Proudhon; with the machinery begins the distinction between masters and wage earners, between capitalist and work men. He considered monopoly as the necessary antithesis of competition. For monopoly attacks everything to itself- land, labour, implements of labour, production and distribution thereof- and annihilates them or it annihilates the natural equilibrium of production and consumption. It causes the labourer to be deceived in the amount of his reward, and causes progress in prosperity to be changed into a continual progress in poverty. Its final result is the inversion of all ideas of justice in common Proudhon accepted the proposition that poverty could only be removed by the

⁴⁰Zenker,E.V (1898), *Anarchism, A criticism and history of the anarchist theory*, London: Methuen and Co, PP:3.

⁴¹Ibid, PP: 14.

⁴² Proudhon did not attack property in itself. He tried to ennoble it and bring it into harmony with the claims of justice and equality by taking away from it what is its right over the arterial element of a thing and the right of devolving it forever. His statement was directed only against this. He said, this kind of property was to be replaced by individual possession.

⁴³Zenker,E.V (1898), *Anarchism, A criticism and history of the anarchist theory*, London: Methuen and Co, PP:34.

labourer receiving the entire result of his labour, and that social reform must, accordingly, consist of some organisation of labour. On the basis of these arguments Proudhon developed his idea about a workers struggle. He regards social revolution as the means and political revolution as the end. In Proudhonism principle of revolution is freedom. That is: 1) Political freedom by the organisation of universal suffrage, by the independent centralisation of social functions and by the continual and unceasing revision of the constitution. 2) Industrial freedom through the mutual guarantee of credit and sale. In other words “no government by men by means of the accumulation of power, no exploitation of men by means of the accumulation of capital.

Michael Bakunin, founder of the international anarchist movement shaped Anarchism into its modern form. According to him, “no theory, no ready-made system, no book that has ever been written will save the world”.⁴⁴ Rooted in Materialistic revolutionary ideas, Bakuninism firmly believed in the immediate revolution and rejected parliamentary democracy as a shameless fiction. For all the assault on revolutionary dictatorship, Bakunin was determined to create his own secret society of conspirators, whose members would be ‘subjected to a strict hierarchy and to unconditional obedience. Its ends pointed towards freedom, but its means- the clandestine revolutionary party- pointed towards totalitarian dictatorship. Bakuninism uphold the ideas of primitive rebellion, conspiratorial revolutionary party, terrorist amoralism, guerrilla insurrectionism, revolutionary dictatorship and the emergence of a new ruling class that would impose its will on the people and rob them of their freedom. Bakuninism states, “freedom is a greater necessity than even the most efficient concentration of political and economic power”.⁴⁵

In 1870, Bakunin regarded the Franco Prussian war as the harbinger of an anarchist revolution in which, the state would be smashed and a free federation of communes arise on its ruins. In criticising Marx’s theory of state, Bakunin maintained that “the state is not merely an agent of the dominant economic class, but also constitute a class in itself, and the most powerful of all by virtue of its monopoly of armed force and its sovereignty over all other social institutions”. A reply to these theories, Marx wrote, “the anarchists’ extreme individualism and subjectivism were a reflection of the petty- bourgeois protest against the development of large scale capitalist production”. In a Marxist view point, Bakunin’s anarchy

⁴⁴Avrich, Paul (1972), *Bakunin on anarchy*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, PP:14

⁴⁵Doldoff, Sam (1972), *Selected works by the activist-founder of world anarchism*, New York: Alfred A Knopf, PP:25

expressed the desperate mood of the downtrodden and deprived masses who had lost faith in the political leaders of various bourgeois parties.

Peter Kropotkin was one of the founding figures of anarchist- communist school of thought states that, a tendency towards anarchism exists in all societies. Kropotkin through his anti authoritarian international enriched the theory of syndicalism, mainly wrote about the practical realisation of anarchist social forms. He is of the opinion that. The working class should have enormous untapped moral and organisational abilities and for the revolution to survive the free anarchist communes, must strive to achieve the highest possible degree of self sufficiency. His major work, 'The conquest of bread' is considered as a great constructivist work of the liberation tradition and dealing anarcho- communist economic theory. He explains that, "the abolition of wage labour is central to anarchist communism ... Anarchist communists argue that there is no valid way of measuring the value of any one person's economic contributions because all wealth is a collective product of current and preceding generations." Anarchist-communism, therefore, can surmise as boiling down to one simple concept: from each according to their ability, to each according to their need. From there, all that stands in the way (the state, capitalism, racism, sexism etc.) must be opposed".⁴⁶ In his opinion, periods of rapid changes will follow the periods of slow evolution, and these periods must be taken advantage of - not for increasing and widening the powers of the state, but for reducing them, through the organization in every township or commune of the local groups of producers and consumers, as also the regional, and eventually the international, federations of these groups.⁴⁷

The workingmen are, therefore, necessarily forced to hurl themselves against the State in their efforts toward emancipation, with a view that, they cannot succeed until they have broken the power of the State. It stresses egalitarianism and the abolition of social hierarchy and class distinctions that arise from unequal wealth distribution, the abolition of capitalism and money, and the collective production and distribution of wealth by means of voluntary associations. They argues that, any economic system based on wage labour and private property will require a coercive state apparatus to enforce property rights and to maintain the unequal economic relationships that will inevitably arise. In anarchist communism, the state

⁴⁶ Kropotkin. Peter (1906), "The Conquest of Bread", [Online: Web] Accessed 12 July 2009, URL: <http://anarchia.wordpress.com/2009/10/09/anarchist-communism-and-mutual-aid-the-revolutionary-thought-of-peter-kropotkin/>

⁴⁷ Kropotkin.,Peter (1910), "Anarchism", [Online: Web] Accessed 9 July 2009, URL: <http://recollectionbooks.com/siml/library/anarchismEncyBrit.htm>

and property no longer exist. In order to achieve these aims, they initiated some kind of revolutionary trade union practices.

Revolutionary Syndicalism is a trade union movement that took birth in France during its revolutionary phase. Syndicalism meant the sum of ideas expressed by the movement and the sum of its activities: it was the outlook shared by members and the form their action took. Syndicalism was also a mode of action and that is much harder to pin down. The Syndicalists often stressed the spontaneity of the movement. It may be, therefore, that a coherent theory did not exist at all. Revolutionary Syndicalism was used by French workers to describe a particular direction in the labour movement. They used the term to distinguish their wing from other wings which were either reformist or revolutionary. By their own definition revolutionary Syndicalism was neither a preconceived theory nor an integrated doctrine but the movement itself. Revolutionary Syndicalism owed much to a small group of men.

The Syndicalists were neither philosophers nor politicians but workers; they were less concerned with ideas than with the actual, everyday struggle to improve their lives. Syndicalism has often been called a philosophy of action. "Sometimes this simply meant that the syndicalists were concerned with a strategy of action rather than the solutions of abstract problem and that they were guided by their own experience, the lessons of life, rather than ivory tower speculation".⁴⁸ Syndicalists did not think about action but acted more or less spontaneously. It is said that, "Syndicalist ideas formed an intuitive mind- picture not a verbal construct".⁴⁹ The movement and its ideas together formed part of a wider current of movements and ideas. Their ideas show many points of contact with a wider movement of thought, generally described as romantic or anti- intellectual and associated with Nietzsche, Bergson and William James. The revolt against democracy on one hand, the revolt against reason on the other and the two were themselves interwoven.

They state, "our environment becomes a vast dumping ground for industry, valued only for profit not for the way it enables and enriches our lives. Whenever we struggle for control over some aspect of our lives, we are engaging in class struggle. When we fight for our communities or our environment we are fighting the class struggle".⁵⁰

French syndicalism was a working-class movement devoted to class war by means of direct action. It affirmed that political action had no place in the struggle for the emancipation of the

⁴⁸Ridley, F.F (1970), *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France, the direct action of this time*, London: Cambridge University Press, PP:6

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰ Introduction to Anarchist Communism (2010), Pamphlet number 21, PP: 4

working class; that that struggle must go on until the working class found itself in command of the instruments of production and until an industrial state, based upon the syndicate had replaced the political state. Syndicalists rejected Marxian tactic of constitutional revolution. Insistence upon the desirability continuous and voluntary action in all spheres of endeavor is one of their main philosophies. They are connecting the origin of state with pure economic factors.⁵¹ It views state as a major tool for making the exploitation possible and it dividing the working class. Syndicalists are of the opinion that, in order to attain maximum effectiveness “economic action should be exercised directly against the class of employers, and the confederal organization must not, as trade union groups, pay any attention to parties and sects which outside of them and by their side, are at full liberty to work for the transformation of society.”⁵²

Thus, they consider the wage-system and capitalist production altogether as an obstacle to social progress. But they point out also that the state was, and continues to be, the chief instrument for permitting the few to monopolize the land, and the capitalists to appropriate for them a quite disproportionate share of the yearly accumulated surplus of production not yet closed.

Both the theories of communism and Anarcho syndicalism put labour in the prominent position for the emancipation of entire human beings in the society. Mass movements of workers by extracting energy from these theories could challenge the embedded practices of society. Throughout the social and political history of Europe, these uprisings challenged the basic contradictions of capitalism. By critically approaching and countering the arguments of each other, the revolutionaries and ultra revolutionaries could enrich and strengthen the ideological realm of trade union movements. The economic and ideological centers of trade unions, Britain and France respectively witnessed mass uprisings against the industrial bourgeois and became a vital factor in deciding the socio- political affairs of particular nationalities with a purely international outlook.

Theories of scientific communism and anarchism provided ideological backbone to working class movement and decided its future with rich theoretical understanding. These theories

⁵¹ Syndicalism argues that when one group became economically strong they are creating a government to protect their interest. When economic life evolved, the governmental machinery had to change to meet the new conditions, and when economic power shifts from one group in the state to another, political power of necessity shifts with it.

⁵² Mac Gibbon, D. A. (1922), “The Revolutionary Cycle in Syndicalism”, *The Journal of Political Economy*, 30(1), PP: 56.

changed the courses of political histories in different parts of the world according to particular social circumstances. But the twentieth century witnessed the dominance of neoliberal ideology, and its influence over trade union movements. It directly or indirectly affected the molding and development of trade unions by using different strategies. Workers under neoliberalism are a complex issue and its negative effect could shake the very basics of the movement.

2.4. Neoliberalisation and Labour

Neoliberalisation or a new financial hegemony by the capitalist countries can be seen as a concomitant change took place in the in the content of political-economic thinking towards the end of the twentieth century. 'Neoliberalism' emerges as an object of conceptual and empirical reflection in the process of restoring to view a sense of political agency to processes previously dubbed globalization".⁵³ Neoliberalism emerges in response to the economic crisis of the 1970s, displacing the 'embedded liberalism' represented by Keynesianism with a more voracious and transparent strategy aimed at restoring capital accumulation. In other words, the most common conceptualization of neo-liberalism is as a policy framework-marked by a shift from Keynesian welfarism towards a political agenda favouring the relatively unfettered operation of markets.

Neoliberalism is an ideology that encompasses various forms of free-market fundamentalism. It is presented as an ideational project and political programme that seeks to supplant collective, public values with individualistic, private values of market rationality as the guiding principles of state policy, economic governance, and everyday life. This new intellectual agenda has been popularized by think tanks and corporate decision makers, backed by powerful international organizers such as the IMF and the World Bank. It brings off various changes in subjectivity by normalizing individualistic self-interest, entrepreneurial values, and consumerism. The neoliberal programme draws its social power from the political and economic power of those whose interests in it like : stockholders, financial operators, industrialists, conservative or social-democratic politicians who have been converted to the

⁵³ Hay, C. (2002). "Globalization as a problem of political analysis: restoring agents to a process without a subject and politics to logic of economic compulsion", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 15(3), PP: 380.

reassuring layoffs of *laissez-faire*, high-level financial officials eager to impose policies advocating their own extinction.

Neoliberalism tends on the whole to favour severing the economy from social realities and thereby constructing, in reality, an economic system conforming to its description in pure theory that is a sort of logical machine that presents itself as a chain of constraints regulating economic agents".⁵⁴ It is commonly said to encompass some major features like the transnationalized production processes, the creation of international regimes by national governments for the trade and investment flows and the acceptance of liberal capitalism as the only viable political economic form. According to Larner, "Neoliberalism is sometimes conceptualised as a *policy* paradigm; sometimes more broadly as a hegemonic *ideology*; and sometimes as a distinctive form of governmentality".⁵⁵ Clive Barnett states, "as a critics' term, neoliberalism is presented as an ideational project and political programme that seeks to supplant collective, public values with individualistic, private values of market rationality as the guiding principles of state policy, economic governance, and everyday life".⁵⁶ The two major characteristics of neoliberal programs are (i) privatization of profit generating activities (ii) transfert to the state that is to say to tax-payers of the social cost (e.g. the consequences of social disaggregation) of neoliberal programs. We can interpret that, neoliberalization either as a utopian project to realize a theoretical design for the reorganization of international capitalism or as a *political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites.⁵⁷

Neoliberalism is tightly linked with capitalism and claim that unrestrained capitalism generates economic growth is convincing. But issues related to economic backwardness made it clear that it do not have any kind of positive effect for the entire society. Critical theories of neoliberalism and neoliberalization provide a compelling moral narrative in which recent history is understood in terms of a motivated shift away from public and collective values towards private and individualistic values. "The aim of neoliberal politics is the restoration of the power of capital to determine the distribution of wealth and to establish the enterprise as dominant form; this requires that it target society as a whole for a fundamental

⁵⁴Bourdieu, Pierre (2006) Utopia of endless exploitation, [Online Web] Accessed 5 August 2009, URL : <http://canadianobserver.wordpress.com/2006/11/19/utopia-of-endless-exploitation/>

⁵⁵ Larner, W. (2000) Neo-liberalism: Policy, Ideology, Governmentality. *Studies in Political Economy* 63 (2), PP: 8

⁵⁶Barnett, Clive (2002), *Public and Markets, What's wrong with Neoliberalism?*, London and New York: Sage. PP:2

⁵⁷ Harvey, David (2005), *A brief History of Neoliberalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, PP: 19.

reconstruction, putting in place new mechanisms to control individual conduct”.⁵⁸ Neoliberalism reduces democracy, creates poverty and inequality, and is imposed either from the outside or by unaccountable elites. We can, therefore, examine the history of neoliberalism either as a utopian project providing a theoretical template for the reorganization of international capitalism or as a political scheme aimed at re-establishing the conditions for capital accumulation and the restoration of class power.⁵⁹ The founding figures of neoliberal thought took political ideals of individual liberty and freedom as sacrosanct—as the central values of civilization.⁶⁰ But paradoxically Neoliberalisation is hurting the labour, a majority section, in many ways. It diminishing the labour bargaining power and creating a disincentive for labour to actively seek labour protect legislation, and leading to organizational fragmentation. Taxation structures that favour capital accumulation over income redistribution, industrial policies that minimise the presence of the state in private industry and retrenchment in welfare spending and making nothing for labour. In this sense the argument, “exploitation via labour markets only works if there exists an overarching large political unit, e.g. a capitalist nation state, with a monopoly of power that simultaneously guarantees well-behaved market exploitation via property rights”.⁶¹

Inherently contradictory social structure of accumulation such as free trade and free capital mobility, monetary restraint, and budgetary austerity under this system is intenting only upper strata of society. The flexibilization of labour markets and the repression of wage demands, the privatization of public companies and services, as well as the workfares restructuring of welfare states, all made this argument clear. Globalization exerts significant effects on labor unions, regardless if they are local, industry, occupational or national. The globalization of today, with its neoliberal character, seems to escalate the capitalistic competitiveness in most aspects of economic interaction, also between workers. That makes globalization a challenge to labor unions.

According to Lévesque & Murray neoliberalisation puts labour unions under considerable stress. In increasingly open economies capital becomes more mobile and the pressurehardens on competitiveness; that is on technological change, to adopt new forms of work

⁵⁸ Lazzarato, Maurizio (2009), Neoliberalism in Action: Inequality, insecurity and the reconstruction of the Social, *Theory, culture and Society*, 26(6), 109-133.

⁵⁹ David Harvey (2007), “Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 6(10), PP: 21.

⁶⁰ Ibid, PP: 29

⁶¹ Hanappi Hardy (2007), “The Dynamics of the Global Political Economy, The Role of Europe”, Lecture delivered on 19 April 2005, International Conference of ANEC: Havana.

organization, to be flexible, to modify the work place and to always press costs. In this context the pressure on unions from its members to intervene effectively to minimize the damages of these changes – gets increasingly intense. The bargaining between union and company becomes decentralized, as national borders are vanishing. Local unions' possibilities to negotiate by a larger national union are diminishing, thus isolating the local union and also reducing its capacity to inflict economic costs on the employer. Also the union as an institution is put under stress, as many managers – under increasing competitiveness – seek to engage directly with the workforce instead of using traditional communication ways with the unions. By doing so they intend to make workers more loyal to the company than to the union solidarity.

Kim Moody showing the basic contradiction between labour and neoliberalism by saying that, “capitalism thrives on competition; unions exist to limit one aspect of this competition, that among workers”.⁶² In this sense neoliberalisation is the biggest enemy of labour unions in the present time.

2.5. Conclusion.

Long ideological struggle among competing philosophies since the last three centuries culminated in the formation of various institutions and mobilization. Labour under supportive theories like communism and syndicalism reached a higher social level but it could not cope up with the modern form of capitalism, namely neoliberalisation. Trade unions with their long cultural legacy developed their ideological culmination and practiced it in different levels. But the blow got by these culminations underlining the importance of rejuvenation. Capitalist ideologies always followed labour in different levels in different time periods. The recent manifestation of capitalism in the form of neoliberalisation again and again stressing the importance of further development of trade unions.

Internalisation of this understanding by the French workers after a shorth period of backwardness made them capable for a mobilistaion. A large scale intervention of unions in the political affairs of the country is clarifying the picture. These moves can be taken as the culmination of their practical ability through an ideological backup.

⁶² Moody, Kim, (1997), *Workers in a lean world – unions in the international economy*. London: Verso, PP: 303.

CHAPTER 3
EMERGENCE, MOBILISATION AND INTERVENTIONS OF
TRADE UNIONS IN FRANCE

CHAPTER 3

Emergence, Mobilisation and Interventions of Trade Unions in France

3.1. Introduction

“The great popular movement that freed France from the enemy was not only a movement of national liberation, but of social liberation also. The foremost role in this "social liberation" of the country was played by French organized labour”.⁶³ This transformation trumpet raised by the labour through trade unions has an umbilical connection with the political history of France. As Frank Tannenbaum quoted “its influence is felt at every point just because it affects every phase of modern society”.⁶⁴ Trade union’s bigwig position in determining the socio-political aspects of French society was not new to such a capitalist world. Trade union movement in France was emanated as a unique coalescence of the amorphous working class mass and the political ideologies which had exquisite influence on the human society. Trade unions made the workers possible to challenge the pressures of economic and political circumstances of the society through a class based insight and perspective. It’s through the unions they emphasised the fact that, freedom and leisure is a universal human right and it is not the established ownership of any exparte viewed authorities to determine the economic and political matters of the society. Political audacity provided by the unions made them capable of questioning things in a stalwart ideological and practical way. Workers put forward various political defence mechanisms by taking inducement from Communism, Socialism, Anarcho- Syndicalism and Catholicism, which were able to deter both internal and external exploitation stratagems. The resurrection of French working class who were once stamped as criminals, barbarians and dangerous, is an inseparable chapter of French political tradition.

3.2. Historical pathways of French working class

Historical and organisational development of the heterogeneous French working class is beyond mere paradoxical generalisations. These developments are closely interrelated with the political and economic undercurrents which decided the ups and downs of French

⁶³ Ehrmann, Henry, W (1947),” French labour goes left”, *Foreign Affairs*, 25(3), PP: 465.

⁶⁴Tannenbaum, Frank (1947), “The social function of trade-unionism,” *Political science quarterly*, 62(2), PP: 168.

societies' particular time periods. Roots of its unorganised character can find in the 1791 Constituent Assembly Law, framed for the abolition of all kind of working class associations.

Trade unions in France with its roots in industrialisation period passed the stages of evolution by responding to the specific national situations of the country. The vivacity of industrialisation and its more visible effects eventually resulted in a consummate change in the 19th century French industrial society. French economy with its specific characteristics like the existence of a rural economy and family centred working unit system collapsed with the intervention of capitalism. Capitalist commodity circulation, advanced transport facilities, expanded and diversified markets and above all the emergence of wage labourers paved way for a new social order. The French working class was the product, mainly of an internal migration of peasants and artisans. It was easier for it to affirm a class consciousness, for, despite the talk of "the two Frances"-the "working France" and the "parasitic" one-it felt itself indubitably French".⁶⁵

French economy in the early years of 19th century was dominated by artisans, peasants and textile workers and there was a high stability in its structure. The 'artisans' working at home or in a small workshop remained a key figure in the economy. Artisans made up some 40% of the labour force in the 1820s, and still some 35% in the 1860s.⁶⁶ Proletarian transmogrification of these sections changed the internal balance structure of the economy. Capitalist ownership of means of production and their control over all channels of profit created numerous threats and challenges to the industrial proletariat. Small workshops and ordinary looms gave way to modern factories and more sophisticated looms respectively. It was during the July Monarchy that France experienced its first economic modernisations. Textile, coal and metallurgical industries were developed around Lillee, Rouen, Mulhouse and Loire basin in St. Estina. During the second empire (1852-70) railway network expanded and more modern mines opened in the North-Eastern part of the country.⁶⁷ Dominance of St. Estine and Lyon in the weaving sector with its advanced mills and crushed the life of weavers and its corollary was an exodus to the newly emerged towns in search of jobs. Rural

⁶⁵ Lorwin, Val, R (1957), "Reflections on the history of the French and American labour movements", *The Journal of Economic History*, 17 (1), PP: 33.

⁶⁶ Magraw, Roger (1992), *The age of artisan revolution, 1815-1871*, UK: Blackwell Publishers, PP: 4

⁶⁷ The bedrock of European modern industrial society was laid in the years between 1850 and 1870. France in these years witnessed a jump in railway mileage from 1900 to 11,500. Production in the French Pas- de- Calais. field rose from 4700 tonnes to 2,200,000. Countries national economy also witnessed a production increase from 4,400,000 to 13,300,000 tonnes

workers were not capable to cope with the entirely different working environment in an easy manner.

Fundamental changes took place in the very nature of life, mainly in family relationships, gradually led the workers to an extremely distressed or afflicted state. Child labour and infant mortality, which reached its zenith⁶⁸ during this time, can read together with this. The expansion of Paris and other French industrial towns led to a breakdown of municipal services, sewages and health facilities, a high incidence of disease (cholera and typhus) and increases in rates of insanity, infanticide, suicide, beggary, crime and prostitution. The fall of average real wages, high taxation and decline in earnings gradually led the country to food riots and machine smashing⁶⁹. The incidence of undernourishment and sickness rose considerably especially in the metal and machine industries. These were the conclusive factors for the demand of the shortening of work time to eight hours and leisure. Workers intransigently put forward the slogan- 'shorter hours and more pay'⁷⁰, which in the course of time became a major tool for the union organisation. The search for a viable alternative to the existing socio-economic conditions took shape in this particular historical juncture, for greater justice, liberty, and dignity in an egalitarian way.

⁶⁸ It is says that the half century after 1820 was a bleak age for working- class children. Employers insisted that child labour was vital if French industry were to remain competitive. Working class families also needed wages from child labour to balance their budgets. Children did become deformed from doing long hours in repetitive jobs in unhealthy surroundings. Their wages were extremely low, often half those of women workers. The industrial court of Vienne noted laconically that 'the workers who direct children can only do so by blows: but there are no acts of inhumanity'. Worries about the fitness of conscripts and some humanitarian concerns led to the 1841 Child Labour Act which sought to set a minimum age of eight years, to ban night work for children less than 13 years and to insist on some educational provision. But the act was systematically evaded. In case of infant mortality, problems like premature weaning, diet deficiencies adulterated food; poor housing and environmental pollution of the industrial cities are considered as the problems.

⁶⁹ Machine-breaking in 1789 unfolded as part of the revolutionary moment. Incidents of machine smashing were common in France in the first half of the 19th century. Appropriately enough, the first and largest incidence of machine-breaking took place in Normandy, the heartland of French attempts to industrialize on the English model. In Lille workers petitioned their government for legislation against the introduction of machinery. One slogan heard in the French Revolution of 1789 was 'down with the machine'. Major centres of machine smashing were Vienne, St. Estienne, Paris, Bordeaux and Toulouse. Even where machines were not actually attacked and damaged, by presence served to mobilise interested parties. French machine-breaking was intertwined with growing popular militancy and the emergence of revolutionary politics, giving a decidedly different twist to labour relations in France that proved extraordinarily significant to the course of French industrial development.

⁷⁰ It is argued that, employers accepted this demand in order to 'habituate a national population to the exigencies of mass production' giving the masses time (and income) to develop the "civilizing" taste for consumer goods necessary for the survival of capitalism. Jurgen Habermas argue that reduced work time was appropriated by consumption, with depoliticizing and culturally narrowing result. Georges Friedman see modern leisure as primarily an escape from meaningless work. Government and private studies claimed that the shorter workday stimulated leisure industries, enhanced the quality of family life contributed to the decline of alcohol consumption and encouraged suburbanisation.

By considering economic and political resurrection as the approximate goal, working class attained a sense of solidarity and class-consciousness which provided the substratum for trade union formation. The absence of social insurance legislation, low wages, severely intensified workplace discipline, curtailed labour mobility, food shortage and corrupt nature of bourgeoisie politics exasperated the working class and gave an invigoration to the trade unions.

3.3. Trade Unions and Organised Political Interventions

The emergence of monopolies in control of vast industrial complexes at the end of the nineteenth century underscored the weakness of a divided working class. The concentrated economic power of corporations and their ability to attack existing craft unions through technological innovation led to greater aggressiveness of employers against the labour movement⁷¹. The embryonic workers movement acquired the flesh and marrow of ideological consciousness and confidence with the emergence of organised trade unions. French political scenario reverberated with workers unity slogans and right declarations. In France, this occurred mainly in the period between 1892 and 1902. These trade unions ultimate goals always went beyond mere material gains and their activities also were not limited. In the 19th and early 20th century, European governmental authorities and the traditional ruling strata viewed various forms of labour class protest almost always as the work of 'agitators', 'conspirators' or preferably 'outsiders'⁷². To the European traditional ruling community, even the idea of trade unionism was unacceptable. By the early twentieth century, the state responded to industrialization and labour unrest by attempting to integrate existing unions into the capitalist system. State adopted "more subtle forms of social control" in addition to overt repression, including collective bargaining, conciliation schemes, state welfare measures, and union recognition⁷³.

3.4. Initial Attempts

Trade unions in France had stood as the main artery of international working class movement throughout its history. French trade unions extracted its essence from the French Revolution

⁷¹ Peterson, Larry (1981), "One big union in international perspective: Revolutionary industrial unionism 1900-1925, *Labour*, 7(1), PP: 43.

⁷² Geary, Dick (1981), *European Labour protest 1848-1939*, London: Croom Helm Ltd, PP: 13.

⁷³ Bob Holton, *British Syndicalism 1900-1914. Myths and Realities* (London 1976),

and Paris Commune (1871). In the words of Lenin, “the thunder of the canon in Paris awakened the most backward sections of the proletariat from their deep slumber, and everywhere gave impetus to the growth of the revolutionary socialist propaganda”⁷⁴. The commune was led by the world’s first mass revolutionary proletarian organisation, the International Working Men’s Association or the First International. The early form of French trade unions could be seen in the Mutual Aid or Friendly Societies and Educational Associations. Proliferated in 1830s, these companionships provided a new impetus and intrinsic strength for all radical working class activities of the French labour.

The defeat of Paris Commune challenged the very existence of labour movements, as it lacked its leaders; most of them were imprisoned or exiled. Attempts were made in 1870s itself for the rejuvenation of the labour organisations. In 1876, First Congress of the Labour Organisation was held, attended by around 360 delegates of unions, co-operatives and mutual aid societies. Higher wages and shorter working hours were highly demanded and suggested peaceful solution to all industrial disputes. Moderates dominated first session was followed by a second one in 1878; also under the influence of moderates. Third Labour Congress held at Marseilles paved way for a Socialist victory and the control of labour movement went to their hands⁷⁵. Following years saw the emergence of some national federations by ‘*Syndicats*’ or unions. Under the initiative of Lyon weavers a congress was called in 1886 to form a wider organisation for moderate and apolitical activities. *Federation nationale des Syndicats*, a Marxist run organisation also took shape at that time.

Revolutionaries emerged from the labour-union movements of the advanced capitalist countries demanded the inclusion of economic organizations and actions and considered it as an integral part of the socialist revolution. One of the cardinal features of industrial unionism after 1900 was its ability to accommodate and pass through a variety of ideologies, none of which ever succeeded in dominating or defining the movement as a whole.⁷⁶

3.5. Major organisations

⁷⁴ Lenin, V.I (1968), Lenin Selected works, vol: 14, Moscow: Progress Publishers, pp: 143.

⁷⁵ When the Labour Congress along with Socialists planned to conduct an International Labour Congress as a part of International exhibition, the government decided to ban it. Moderates led Labour Congress obeyed the government decision and Socialist under the leadership of Jules Duesde raised strong opposition against that. They called the congress and received arrest. These incidents resulted in a socialist triumph at the Third Labour Congress. In that a collectivist resolution was passed by 73 votes to 27.

⁷⁶ Peterson, Larry (1981), “The one big union in international perspective: Revolutionary industrial unionism 1900-1925”, *Labour*, 7(1), PP: 45.

French working class always embodying a radical stance linked to its revolutionary past. They were simultaneously embedded in often overlapping ideological discourses. These ideologies shaped all aspects of French trade union policies including the form, nature, and level of demands, willingness to compromise and ratify accords, frequency and type of industrial action, and employment policies. Continuous ideological dialogue among and within the organisations has reflected the intensity, and defined the grounds, of union competition. By expressing harmony and animosity towards international developments, French unions, accepted and rejected various ideological approaches occasionally; most of them in the course of time became an integral part of the French society. Trade unions moulded sometimes with extreme radical approaches and other times with utter moderate policies. Most prominent modern trade unions in France developed with Syndicalist, Communist and Catholic streams of ideas.

3.5.1. Revolutionary Syndicalism; Sowing and climbing

CGT, (*Confédération generale du Travail*)

CGT, the most prominent trade union of France was founded in 1895 and later fused with the national federation of *bourses du travail*⁷⁷. The union was a strong upholder of revolutionary syndicalism in its initial years. In the opinion of F.F. Ridley, “revolutionary Syndicalism was neither a preconceived theory nor an integrated doctrine but the movement itself, its principles and its practice, it is reasonable to define syndicalism as the principles and practice of the CGT between 1902 and 1914”.⁷⁸ Syndicalist tradition strongly believed that economic struggle is the only way to achieve workers’ emancipation. Pre-war CGT, “founded its philosophy of action on the Marxian doctrine of class war”, at the same time, “it rejected Marx’s conviction that the expropriation of the exploiters would be accomplished irresistibly through a natural economic evolution”.⁷⁹ They viewed direct action, strike and ultimately the general strike as the steps in this revolutionary process. Strong opposition towards the parliamentary democracy and political parties became their keywords. This commitment compelled them to avoid all kind of cooperation with middle class elements.

⁷⁷ Bourses du travail announced the development of a new interorganizational network in the French labour movement. This institutional form was the major impetus for the reorientation of trade union allegiances and alignments in the early 1890s

⁷⁸ Ridley, F.F (1970), *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France, the direct action of its time*, Britain: Cambridge University Press, PP: 3

⁷⁹ Sappos, David, J (1931), *The Labour movement in post-war France*, USA: Russell And Russell, PP:9

The 1906 constitution of CGT stated that, “the trade union, which is today a fighting organisation, will in the future be an organisation for production and distribution and the basis of social reorganisation”.⁸⁰ Their first aim was the defence of the immediate ‘economic, moral and professional’ interests of the workers. The final emancipation of the proletariat by the destruction of the capitalist system and the overthrow of the state itself became the secondary aim.⁸¹ CGT wanted a kind of political neutrality and stood outside the political parties. ‘Charter of Amiens’ (1906), the most distilled and comprehensive official statement of the French Syndicalist doctrine, laid its foundation. The Charter States: - “the CGT is preparing that complete emancipation which can only be accomplished when the capitalist is expropriated”⁸². It affirmed that “the congress decides that in order that syndicalism may attain its maximum effectiveness, economic action should be exercised directly against the class of employers, and the confederal organization must not, as trade union groups, pay any attention to parties and sects which outside of them and by their side, are at full liberty to work for the transformation of society”.⁸³ ‘Direct action’, the celebrated policy in the last section of the Charter of Amiens became one of the popular slogans of CGT. It meant a total freedom from entire exterior agencies interventions and the elimination of government or state. Resolution of the 1904 Bourges Congress upheld the spirit of this policy, culminated in a mass agitation for eight hours work. The resolution explains: - “The Congress, considering that the workers cannot count, for the amelioration of the conditions in which they work, on any action but their own, and considering that a campaign of agitation for the eight- hour day is a step in the direction of defensive emancipation, organises the confederation to organize an intense and growing agitation in order that on May 1, 1906, the workers shall of themselves cease to work more than eight hours each day”⁸⁴

Anti-militaristic agitation occupies a prominent position in CGT’s activities. They considered it as an integral part of Direct Action Programme. By viewing army as an instrument of governmental repression, they aimed its destruction. To the Syndicalists, “the wars of states presented no interest, except in so far as they might be turned to the profit of the proletariat in its conduct of the war of the classes”.⁸⁵ With the vision of community reorganization on

⁸⁰ Lowrin, Val, R (1954), *The French labour movement*, USA: Harvard University Press, PP: 30.

⁸¹ Ridley, F.F (1970), *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France, the direct action of its time*, Britain: Cambridge University Press, PP: 83

⁸³ Mac Gibbon, D,A (1922), The revolutionary cycle in syndicalism, *The Journal of Political Economy*, 30(1), PP: 56

⁸⁴ Sappos, David, J (1931), *The Labour movement in post-war France*, USA: Russell And Russell, PP: 14.

⁸⁵ Abid, PP : 20.

syndical organization basis, they totally negated the concept of the 'unity of government'. CGT approached government pension scheme as a 'colossal swindle' and urged the workers for its rejection. Theory of gradual evolution and indirect influence was taken by CGT for its objective modification.

3.5.2. Communist Trade Unionism

Conservative and revolutionary elements of the syndicalist union resulted in the formation of CGTU. Being a French manifestation of communist unionism, CGTU completely denied the doctrines of Charter of Amiens. Reforms and social legislation of CGTU evolved from its predecessor, CGT. CGTU bulletin *La Vie Syndicale* wrote, "all the external difficulties of the bourgeois government must be turned by the proletariat to its own revolutionary ends should a use a possible declaration of war as the signal for resurrection".⁸⁶ Ideological clashes led CGTU to a scission. The labour sections interest between economic demands and political action led to the formation of CGT-FO in 1947. This Social Democratic trade union model, broke out from CGT, opposed the supremacy of any political party.

3.5.3. Catholic Trade Unionism

"French Social Catholicism has been essentially a middle-class movement with little appeal for industrial workers".⁸⁷ Paris Commercial and Industrial Employees' Trade Union declared the birth of French catholic trade unions in 1887. Presence of exclusively Feminine Unions was a significant feature of the french christian unionism and it became a dominant power only in the early years of the 20th century. Catholic Women's trade unionism belongs to three principal groups. They are: - The central Federation of Women's Trade Union, often called the 'abbaye unions' from the name of the street where they had their first head quarters in Paris; 2) The French Federation of Unions of Women's Trade Association' 3) The Free Trade Union of the Department of Isere".⁸⁸ Headed by Aalbert de Mun and leaders of Catholic Social reformers, corporate occupational groups were formed. For legally organised trades, they laid

⁸⁶ *La Vie Syndicale* (1948), [Online: Web] Accessed on July 2009, URL: <http://ideas.repec.org/p/mse/wpsorb/v04084.html>

⁸⁷ Barnes, H, Samuel (1959), "The politics of French Christian labour", *The Journal of Politics*, 21(1), PP: 105.

⁸⁸ Turmann, Max, *The Christian trade union movement in France*.

foundation for many programme⁸⁹. Initiatives were taken by them to form 'mixed trade associations', including both employers and workers without any discrimination. Emergence of CFTC (*Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens*) entered into the French trade union sphere with a pure national organisation. CFTC "rejects the theory of revolution by peaceful penetration no less than that of revolution by pursuit of the class war, and founds its doctrine as well as its action upon the Christian principles of justice and charity as set forth in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo 14".⁹⁰ CFTC considering man as the essential element of production. It had the realisation that the existing social situation is not capable for the material, moral and intellectual satisfaction of the worker, as he is the basic instrument and object of the production. It was strictly against the political and revolutionary strike of other radical organisations. Working class interest protection mutual benefit services in an extremely peaceful way became its hallmark. It upheld the policy of collective bargaining and for cooperative societies, employment bureaus, technical classes and evening study classes for the benefit of workers. CFTC periodical *L'Employé* states: - "the CFTC believes that legislation for the protection of the working classes are to be considered neither as favors nor as privileges granted to the workers, but as measures of elementary justice, which it will be impossible to modify or delay indefinitely, without gravely compromising the maintenance and development of the productive forces of the country".⁹¹ Confessional and white collar make-up became its characteristic features.

Representatives of traditional reactionary and paternalistic French Catholicism, CFDT carried the syndicalist tradition in a more moderate way. The new union "exercises its political role directly, intervenes in public discourse through its own resources, that accepts the party system but does not ally itself with any party and that retains for itself the mission of defining and advocating a new society".⁹²

⁸⁹ Major lines of these programmes were: PP: - 1) All the members of each occupation, in an area to be specified should be officially entered on a special list of the public administrative authorities. 2) The members of each occupation so entered on this list should constitute the corporate occupational group. 3) Each corporate occupational group would have special regulations applying to all members of the occupation. 4) In each corporate occupational group various trade association would be freely formed, whether of employers, or of workers, or mixed, in accordance with the act of the 1884.

⁹⁰ Sappos, David, J (1931), *The Labour movement in post-war France*, USA: Russell And Russell, PP: 107.

⁹¹ *L'Employé*, NO: 351, PP: 14. [Online: Web] Accessed on 12 July 2009, URL: <http://www.scirp.org/journal/PaperInformation.aspx?paperID=2061>.

⁹² Reynaud, Jean Daniel (1975), "Trade unions and political parties in France, Some recent trends", *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, 28(2), PP:210

World Wars: Reactions and New Political Definitions

According to Richard Hyman, "The years around the beginning of the twentieth century and its end were periods of key historical importance, in the first for the founding, in the second for the restructuring, of International trade unionism".⁹³ Those skilled workers who had previously been in the forefront of job control struggles began to develop organizational forms that promised to transcend the boundaries of craft and to include the mass of less skilled workers in the general project of democratic management. After the First World War, workers struggle took new forms for the control of their own productive activities and initiated a general project of democratic management. "For the first time the efforts of skilled workers to control their own jobs were transformed into mass struggles to wrest control of the production process as a whole from the capitalist class and to lodge it in organs democratically constituted by the workers themselves".⁹⁴ Mobilization of industry for war production and the impact of this mobilization on the working classes can be considered as its reason.

Second World War created catabolism in the in the political organisms of France. By the outbreak of the World War fewer than 10% of the total French labour force had been drawn into economic or political organisations. CGT regarded war as an unexampled calamity. But the post-war period witnessed a severe ideological clash between two Sections of the CGT. Minority section raised strong voice against the nationalisation and class collaboration. They viewed minorities' decisions as a betrayal of the revolutionary spirit of the charter of Amiens.

War time witnessed the reversal of CGT from its revolutionary ideas. Leaders' entry to the governmental bodies during the war was a clear sign of its change.⁹⁵ Through these new class collaborations, they undermined the basic internal policies and general activities of the union. They gave up even the May Day celebrations and embraced the methods, once they considered as revisionist and meaningless. The attitudes and approaches of pre-war CGT completely collapsed and the transformed union justified it as a realistic defence of the interest of the workers. They began to give up strike activities and violence. CGT stated: -

⁹³ Hyman, Richard (2002) "The international labour movement on the threshold of two centuries agitation, organisation, bureaucracy, diplomacy, 12(3),PP:1

⁹⁴ Sirianni, Carmen, J(1980), "Workers control in the era of world war First: A comparative analysis of the European experience", *Theory and Society*,9(1), PP: 29

⁹⁵ When Jouhaux offered a propagandist post, CGT gave complete support. The union welcomed his entry into the *Comite de Secours National* (a body composed of representatives of all classes of society) and into the commission du travail charged with the organization of the Parisian labour market. In 1916, the secretary of CGT was a member of a commission appointed by the minister of munitions for the solution of labour problems in the factories devoted to manufacture of war material, with a view to the intensification of production.

“the strike has developed into a brutal and unjust weapon which affects not merely the parties in conflict. Even if today the right of strike must be considered as inviolable, it is none the less a derivative of the primitive right of force, and for this reason, if for no other, it is incumbent upon society to introduce into the realm of labour means of obtaining justice and rules for the examination of differences, which are more in keeping with the social and economic interdependence of mankind and of our very civilisation.”⁹⁶

The emotional strains of the world war and inspiration from Bolshevik Russia led to the schisms in CGT. Post-war reformist CGTs Minimum Programme⁹⁷, issued in December 1918 obviously expressed its hardly revolutionary character and worked for its immediate realisation. For CGT, collective bargaining became ‘absolute negation of the principle of authority and the idea of domination’. CGTs Gradual departure from its established policies finally resulted in its direct or indirect political participation, the idea once they strongly denied.

CFDTs new approach towards collective action and union behaviour underwent tremendous changes in the second half of the 20th century. “There was a renewal of militant trade union consciousness, which manifested itself in new issues and the development of new forms of action at the grass root”⁹⁸ The most vital thing happened was, it declared the commencement of ideological transmogrification in CFTC, the largest non-communist trade union organization in France. It decided to give up the Christian moral principles from Article one of its statutes and renamed it as CFDT (*Confederation Franqaise Democratique du Travail*). It was the culmination of internal union examination, began in 1960. “They represented the culmination of an ideological evolution which had been going on uninterruptedly since the end of World War II.”⁹⁹ They had the opinion that the union should be completely free from

⁹⁶ *LA Voix du peuple*, NO. 74, PP: 364 , [Online: Web] Accessed on 18 July 2009, URL: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/minutes/footnotes1.htm>

⁹⁷ The demands of the minimum programme are: - 1) international peace on the basis of the Fourteen Points; 2) Participation of workers’ representatives in the activities of the peace conference; 3) Abolition of all restrictions upon the liberties of the individual; 4) Granting of full Syndical rights to the functionaries ;5) The eight hour day.6) Creation of a “*conseil National Economique*”; 7) reconstruction of three devastated regions through the instrumentality of producers’ and consumers’ cooperative societies; 8) National control of industry; 9) return to the nation of all essential resources and their exploitation under its control by autonomous societies representing consumers and producers; 10) National welfare work, insurance etc. ; 11) Control of immigration and protection of immigrant workers; 12) Social legislation- workers compensation, old age pensions, sanitary legislation; 13) Free- trade regime for all necessaries; 14) Liquidation of all war debts by taxes on profits, inheritance etc.

⁹⁸ Segrestin, Denis (1984), , *The French workers’ movement: Economic crisis and political change*, London: George Allen and Unwin, PP:202edited

⁹⁹ Thormann, Gerard, C (1970), “The ideological evolution of French Christian tade unionismsince world war second”, *The Catholic Historical Review*, 56(1), PP: 67.

the pressures Catholic Church especially in case of policy making. A smaller faction sought to emphasize the working-class heritage of the CFTC, to sever all confessional connections, and to attempt to gain members among non-Roman Catholic workers. The majority, close to the MRP (Mouvement Republicain Populaire), remained loyal to Christian Democracy; the minority sought a new, non-doctrinaire Democratic Socialism. They pointed the inability of union in reaching the common mass working class and challenged its white collar and Social Catholic leadership. The minority at least has an aggressive working-class outlook and accepts the class struggle "as a fact" of contemporary French society while denying it philosophical significance in the Marxist sense.¹⁰⁰ Basic industrial unions like metal and building traders, gas and electric power workers were the strength behind this change. Paul Vignaux, who is often referred to as the "spiritual father" of the minority did much for the minority. Public school teachers, inspired by the 'personalist' philosophy of Immanuel Mounier were its stern supporters and they tried to interconnect the gap between Catholicism and anticlericalism. Majority strength rests on white-collar employees (especially the Federation of Employees), textile workers, miners, and the departmental unions dominated by these groups. A study group called 'reconstruction' was started by them for the promotion of these new ideas. Their attempt to democratize the internal decision-making process of the confederation became fruitful with the 1947 Convention. International development in trade union sphere increased the rift between majority and minority factions of the CFDT. Heated debate in connection with international affiliation of the union during the 1949-1951 time periods, minority was in favour of a connection with International Confederation of Free Trade Unions against the Communist dominated World Federation of Trade Unions. For the traditional leadership this was against the independent existence of the union with social Christian ideas.¹⁰¹ They wanted to keep homogeneity in doctrines which will be impossible with International Confederation of Free Trade Union. Minority strongly opposed highly moralistic and extremely capitalistic which gradually paved way for the discussions about socialism. "The minority seems to advocate a non-dogmatic socialism to which persons of different philosophical inclinations may subscribe. It advocates neither a materialistic philosophy nor a political dictatorship; it is firmly committed to democratic institutions and rejects revolution and violence. On the basis of a serious analysis of contemporary France, the minority has concluded that only a planned economy with considerable public ownership

¹⁰⁰ Barnes, H, Samuel (1959), "The politics of French Christian labour", *The Journal of Politics*, 21(1), PP: 109.

¹⁰¹ Majority spokesmen argued that the ICFTU was predominately Anglo-Saxon and that the CFTC would be an ineffectual minority within it. The Free International was said to be merely a negative anti-communist organization and membership would not benefit the CFTC

can improve the lot of the French working class".¹⁰² Majority minority antagonisms officially ended in 1957.

Communist led CGTU underwent dramatic incidents, culminated in the formation of FO (*Force Ouvriere*). This union has long been considered as a rather fragile entity with an uncertain future. It is generally argued that FO was totally guided and funded by American CIA¹⁰³. When it came to being CGT-FO inherited the basic guiding principles of pre- 1936 CGT. These includes: - "1) autonomy of trade union action, with a stress on collective agreements; 2) a policy of presence, which entails participation in the regulatory powers of the state; and 3) workers' control".¹⁰⁴ The 1971 report of the FO titled, 'The place of trade unionism in society' declares: - "the trade unions duty is to defend the specific interest of the working class, whether under the capitalist or socialist regime. The union must guard strictly against any form of integration into the apparatus of the state or the firm"¹⁰⁵. FO carried French reformist tradition and pluralistic democratic conception. Transformed French atmosphere with the emergence of Fifth Republic in 1958 take away FO through some redefined ways. It recognised De Gaullism but compelled to curtail its political involvement and dispossessed from responsibilities of incomes policies. FO stressed the strict separation between the trade union and all forms of political authority. Revolutionary Syndicalists and Trotskyist were the minorities in FO, always stood against the sharing of managerial responsibilities. Instead they preferred "a confederation dominated by a reformist majority to one that poses directly difficult question of power. FO reacted to the May upheavals in a very mild way. In FO's opinion the crisis, "which the escalation of the oil prices brought into the open, is structural in essence and stems from disequilibrium on a world scale"¹⁰⁶ They recommended international cooperation instead of conjunctual remedies. FO was against any kind of trade-off between inflation and unemployment. What guided the policies of FO during this time was the maintenance of purchasing power and social protection measures. Its main strength lies in the civil service. In the economic crisis context, it suggested cooperatism in wage matters, albeit moderated by economic realism. According to FO, the future of

¹⁰² Barnes, H, Samuel (1959), "The politics of French Christian labour", *The Journal of Politics*, 21(1), PP: 111.

¹⁰³ This was confirmed in 1967 by the declarations of Mr. Thomas. W. Braden who had worked closely with Allen Dulles at the head of the CIA. The break- away of FO, as well as the SFIO news paper *Le Populaire*, was financed by the American Federation of Labour through the intermediary of the International Ladies' Garments Union; when the AFL required money for this and similar purposes in Europe, the CIA gave it.

¹⁰⁴ Bergounioux, Alian (1984), *The French workers' movement: Economic crisis and political change*, London: George Allen and Unwin, PP: 94.

¹⁰⁵ *Abid*, PP: 94.

¹⁰⁶ Bergounioux, Alian (1984), *The French workers' movement: Economic crisis and political change*, London: George Allen and Unwin, PP: 96.

modern society does not depend on what goes on within the enterprise but rather outside it- in the development of 'leisure time'. In this FO also differs from the social democratic tradition, which has promoted co managerial formulas".¹⁰⁷

3.7. Strikes: French experiences

Strikes are playing a very prominent role by using the means of mass mobilisation. For the French, the strike has been an episode in the class struggle. Carol Conell and Samuel Cohn are of the opinion that, "strikes create further strikes in both established and unestablished labour movements; strikes transmit information about grievances, opportunities for striking, and the favourability of bargaining conditions. Furthermore, whether or not strikes are the primary vehicle for communicating this information has direct effects on actual patterns of strike clustering"¹⁰⁸. According to the French philosopher Georges Sorel, "the myth of the general strike connected all the "noblest, deepest, and most moving sentiments" of the working class together into a coordinated picture"¹⁰⁹. Both economic and socio-political contexts are playing decisive role in determining the intensity and durability of strikes. "Strike movements represent the spearhead of political action by workers in France, and, consequently, their periodicity is regulated by national political crisis rather than by fluctuations in economic activity"¹¹⁰ Mark Kessleman is of the opinion that, "during much of the twentieth century, French workers have displayed an especially great propensity to strike"¹¹¹. The 1876 first National Congress of labour organisations pronounces strike as an unsatisfactory weapon and they favoured a peaceful solution to industrial questions. In France strikes were effectively unionised in 1884. Third decade of the twentieth century and the immediate post war years gave rise to mass political protests in France. FO considered strike as the 'weapon of last resort'. It sees the strike as "most effective in a dissuasive capacity, that is, successful when not put in use"¹¹². But the 1968 stand as a unique chapter in the history of mass movements.

¹⁰⁷ Abid, PP: 100.

¹⁰⁸ Conell, Carol and Cohn, Samuel (1995), "Learning from other peoples actions: Environmental variation and diffusion in French coal mining strikes", *The American Journal of Sociology*, 101(2), PP: 367.

¹⁰⁹ Sorel, Georges (1950), *Reflections on Violence*, New York: Collier, PP: 127.

¹¹⁰ Dubois, Pierre Mark (1984), *The French workers' movement: Economic crisis and political change*, London: George Allen and Unwin, PP: 216.

¹¹¹ Keeselman, Mark (1984), *The French workers' movement: Economic crisis and political change*, London: George Allen and Unwin, PP: 1

¹¹² Bergounioux, Alian (1984), *The French workers' movement: Economic crisis and political change*, London: George Allen and Unwin, PP: 97.

France witnessed participation of all unions and strata of society, who blocked country's economic and academic life in a spontaneous way.

3.7.1. The great upheaval of 1968

Early summer of May 1968 marked a watershed in French political history which redefined the subsequent political equations of the country.[See **Appendix 1**] Awakened against the regime of Charles De Gaulle's Fifth Republic, vigorous protesters including both workers and students¹¹³ occupied the streets, factories and universities of France and made all existing political institutions quite irrelevant. On this chaotic situation, BBC reported that, "Carrying flags and banners, workers, students and teachers chanted, "De Gaulle assassin."¹¹⁴ This spontaneous revolutionary upheaval made it clear that, revolutionary situation can occur in fertile capitalist soil like France. This wildcat strike¹¹⁵ of the working class could shake the basement of the hierarchical order, centralism and authoritarian tendencies. The notorious economic insecurities of 1960s placed the workers at the edge of anxiety. John Gretton explains: - "A balance of payment problem had begun to appear for the first time for several years, production was stagnant, investment at a minimum, and the Bourse even less active than usual. The imminent end of protectionism within the common market had caused a veritable panic among employers; in 1966 there were more merges than in the whole of the previous decade, and there were as many as 60 in 1967 alone. And for the workers, there was unemployment".¹¹⁶ Started as a lock-out at the Rhodiaceta factory in Besancon, all the major trade unions joined together for a common aim.

Factories were occupied by the workers by raising some demands¹¹⁷. In their letter to the management they stressed the demand for the extension of union rights. These includes: - a) freedom of action for union organizations within industry: collection of subscriptions, distribution of press and union literature, staff meetings and assemblies during working hours

¹¹⁴BBC (2010), [Online: Web] Accessed on 13 October 2010, URL: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/13/newsid_2512000/2512413.stm.

¹¹⁵ Wildcat strikes are the actions taken by the workers without the authorisation of their trade union officials. Wildcat strikes are practically unknown since most of the local union sections are not subject to any central or federal discipline. It did not have its origin in any union call to action. It was the key fighting strategy during the events of May 1968 in France. Ordinarily it constitutes a violation of an existing collective bargaining contract, so the strikes are not protected unless the whole union joins them and ratifies the protest.

¹¹⁶ Gretton, John (1969), *Students and workers, An analytical account of dissent in France May- June 1968*, London: Macdonald and company, PP: 142.

¹¹⁷ Demands of the strikers include: - 1) Repeal of the regulations concerning social security 2) Extension of union rights including; a) freedom of action for union organizations within industry

b) Application of Article 2 of the law of 18 June 1966 concerning the social attributions of the worker- management committee, the text to be modified in the following way: the worker management committee participates with the management, instead of cooperating, the committee decides what use to make of the 1% contribution out of salaries, the committee decides on solutions to general problems concerning professional training and finishing c) Application of article 3 of the law of 16 May 1946, which concerns the economic role of the worker management committee, the phrase ‘on a consultative basis’ being abolished”.¹¹⁸

On 30th May French radios broadcasted the speech of De Gaulle’. In that he crudely declared that, “these methods are intimidation, intoxication, and tyranny exercised by groups long organised for that purpose, and by a party which is a totalitarian enterprise even if it already has rivals in that respect”¹¹⁹. Trade union leaderships’ intervention in this struggle happened only in the last stage. CGT leadership, from the very beginning strongly opposed the sudden actions of workers, as it was against the organisational norms. CFDT assimilated the anti-bureaucratic and anti-productivist themes of May- June and proclaimed its revolt against all forms of alienation: degradation of work process, hierarchical division of authority, sexual and radical discrimination, and destruction of the natural environment”

3.8. Trade union Responses to State and Society.

Intense rivalries among the trade unions are a visible characteristic throughout the trade union history of France. These inter union competitions, from the grass root to the top most level, for controlling the mass actions, moulded the very nature of the unions and its members. French unionism in 1970s adopted distinctive industrial practices through which they shaped and advanced their ideological realm. Trade unions, with their adaptive or reactive nature took timely measures to cope up with the spontaneously changing political climate and market fluctuations. In the second half of the twentieth century, all major trade unions attempted to correlate industrial relation practices with their ideology. After the war CGT actively cooperated with the government and the Planning Commission. In 1977, “organised labours’ Strategies and interrelations with state CGT revised its hierarchical wage policies and admitted that the crisis of capitalism had a social and cultural dimension that required for

¹¹⁸Gretton, John (1969), *Students and workers, An analytical account of dissent in France May- June 1968*, London: Macdonald and company, PP: 218

¹¹⁹ The Times (1968), [Online: Web] Accessed on 13 October 2010, URL: <http://cgi.ebay.co.uk/SOCCER-STAR-MAGAZINE-31st-MAY-1968-/250751226946>

its resolution greater initiative and cooperation among workers and democratisation of the work place”.¹²⁰

Since the mid-1970s, long-term mass unemployment has become a major problem of European welfare states; it has also aggravated the membership problems and taxed the bargaining power of unions. In France, the repercussions of this economic crisis, especially from the fall of 1974 to summer 1977, shook the old labour and its associated social dynamic. Most directly affected industries witnessed high degree of militancy. Economic crisis subsequently resulted in a notable increase in the party membership, mainly favoured socialist party and isolated the extreme left. Taking advantage of the situation, bourgeoisie developed their own concept by making the actual cause as blameless. It argued, “the crisis depends on objective factors, such as oil prices over which no one has control and is therefore a matter of fate to which everyone must submit”.¹²¹ Still political consciousness of the workers remained the same and through their organisation they responded to all ideological persuasions. Crisis repercussions in one way culminated in an alliance between the communist and socialist parties of France.

The institutionalised trade unions under new capitalist mode of regulation had to redefine its strategies. Fragmented labour of the crisis time underwent crucial disillusionment which gradually led them to put forward a new kind of industrial counterproposal as an element of their new strategy. Union intervention at the branch level and counter proposals at the firm level were a part of this strategy. At the branch level they initiated a strategy based on an entire political and economic situation analysis. Among this Economic Counter Plan (ECP) occupied the prominent place.¹²² The second strategy named Industrial counter proposals (ICP) involves a transition to a new mode for the unions, involving the formulation of proposals rather than the issuance of demands. An industrial counterproposal suggests “alternative means and ends relating to the manufacture of a product, ranging from the conditions of production to marketing of the final product, coupled with consideration of the

¹²⁰ Moss, Bernard, H (1984) *The French workers movement: Economic crisis and political change*, London: George Allen and Unwin, PP: 239.

¹²¹ Moss, Bernard, H (1984) *The French workers movement: Economic crisis and political change*, London: George Allen and Unwin, PP: 280.

¹²² Common programme strategy means, unions will supplement their usual tactics with arguments from economics. Its main intention was to win concessions from management and stake out a position vis- a- vis the political parties. In this highly centralised strategy, promotion of economic activity through demand stimulus remains the primary focus of this policy. Critics argued that common programme will cause severe economic programmes and gravely disrupt France’s relations with the rest of Europe. Francois Ceyrac, one of France’s top businessmen, called the common programme as a formidable menace to companies and to the entire economy.

purposes of the production.”¹²³ CFDT complete relied upon ICP and CGT prefers the ECP and FO kept a distance from economic or industrial policy interventions.

Instead of distinctive industrial policies, CGT, CFDT and FO developed their theories and praxis in accordance with specific national and international situations. Post war CGT moulded its ideology mainly from the French Communist Party (PCF). From 1978 onwards, Common Programme¹²⁴ of the left paved way for a neo-syndicalist strategy of *autogestion* or worker control. Defeat of the left in 1978 made CGT closer to neo-syndicalist strategy which proposed worker control over production and industrial redeployment and also intended immediate gains through local struggles. By raising the level of combativity and struggle, it called the workers for direct action and against third party arbitrators and automatic cost of living indexes. It favoured and sometimes negated various state agreements, settlements and interventions for the constant benefit of the working class.¹²⁵ Left defeat in 1978 led CGT towards a more plant, regional and branch activity. Since May 1981 the CGT has restricted its activism to national strikes and the relatively low level weak of action.

FO, the most sectoralist and wage oriented union, adopted a social democratic approach for reformism since 1968 and upheld collective bargaining and social welfare policies for the promotion of working class. It favoured welfare state capitalism in one hand and criticised free market liberalism on the other. “Arising out of opposition to communist domination of the CGT, FO attempted to counter CGT strategy by creating stable bargaining relationship with employers and avoiding excessive demands that might destabilise the economy”.¹²⁶ FO in the post war period rarely engaged in national level joint actions. Minimalist in the formulation and negotiation of demands, FO showed least interest in strikes. Preference for negotiation over action can be considered as one of their major characteristics. However they shared joint platforms with CGT and CFDT whenever it needed.

Early 1970s witnessed the shift of CFDT from a moderate social democratic union to a radical new left movement. Since its activities were limited in local and regional level, it was

¹²³ Huiban, Jean-Pierre (1984) *The French workers movement: Economic crisis and political change*, London: George Allen and Unwin, PP: 232.

¹²⁴ In common programme left sought a global political solution. Introduction of the common program isolated left and as a consequence it radicalized its approach with plant occupation to save jobs and equipment.

¹²⁵ CGT was in favor of national agreements that set minimum standard which could be surpassed by local struggles. It combated contracts that bound unions with no-strike, prior notice, or arbitration clauses. It refused settlements, in which unions were asked to distribute a fixed wage sum to different categories by saying that it will divert workers away from the struggle with capital

¹²⁶ Moss, Bernard, H (1984) *The French workers movement: Economic crisis and political change*, London: George Allen and Unwin, PP: 243.

a complete success in attracting the new social categories by giving a humanistic chord. With an intention to create a socialist alternative to PCF, CFDT raised questions related to grass root democracy and women rights and low wage workers. It made a friendly alliance with the so called 'newly radicalised social categories' like women, immigrants and youth. Both moderate and radicals¹²⁷ in the CFDT with its neo- syndicalist strategy for a structural reformation made an alliance with CGT in 1970. But their return to the reorientation policy again focused 'bargaining' of 1960s¹²⁸ at their centre. Being a principal social partner of Mitterrand regime, it supported his objective of a revitalised socialist party. In order to increase the level of social consciousness and solidarity, they gave utmost importance to qualitative themes including solidarity with the low paid and the reduction of hours and improvement of working conditions. CFDT declared, "qualitative demands concerning wage equality and working conditions posed greater challenges to capitalism than did bread-and-butter demands that were easily digested by the system".¹²⁹ In industrial action CFDT stood in between CGT and FO, it accepted the help of extreme left occasionally. Formation of strike committees outside the union structure was their strategy along with Italian practice of 'articulated action' arising from plants and spreading to region, branch and nation. In the course of time CGT strongly criticised many actions of CGT by arguing its actions as the capitulation to the forces of capitalism and imperialism, especially when they turned towards right in 1974.

Relationship among the trade unions, state and employers was a prominent factor in the French working class development. It was not a part of the economic policy framing compare to its counterparts in Britain, Germany and Sweden. Their exclusion from the nucleus of power and decision making, especially during the crisis time deteriorated labour-management relations. This particular time period announced a drastic shift in the economic policy of the French government. The state withdrew to some extent from management of the public sector, confirming its neoliberal leanings. Economic policies became a main agenda in 1978 legislative elections, to which workers took an anti stand by underlining importance to the nationalisation of industries. Nationalisation, a catalyst for structural reforms, was a major

¹²⁷ Moderates, a force in the metal, chemical and agricultural sector, mainly raised their voice against common programme for its quantitative maximalism and political centralism under the leadership of Edmond Maire. Radicals actually supported this programme mainly for the realization of work managed socialism in a rapid way. Health, bank and hucitex were their main strong holds.

¹²⁸ During the 1950s and 1960s CFDT engaged in collective bargaining agreement along with CGT and FO. A series of unity pacts, which begun in 1966, resumed in 1970 and capped in 1974, tended to bring federal platforms into alignments.

¹²⁹ Moss, Bernard, H (1984) *The French workers movement: Economic crisis and political change*, London: George Allen and Unwin, PP: 249.

demand they highlighted from 1945¹³⁰. The essential purpose of nationalisation was to give the initiative to the state along with the means of carrying out an industrial policy unfettered by short term financial constraints. Working class viewed the economic crisis as a sign of the day by day worsening capitalist ideological and practical contradictions. Unions tried to precipitate their demands to face the crisis. Wage regulation became a heated debate in the labour management negotiations. CFDT put forward the self-management concept, which was able to challenge economic aspects of all levels of hierarchy. It proposed new controls on investment and full nationalisation of credit and a total remodelling of the economic system.

The architecture of the world economy had changed fundamentally since the early 1970s with the breakdown of the Breton Woods system and the rise of international capital markets. Neoliberal economic policies growth in France by taking advantage of the incapacity of government led France to chaos. Determination power of market mechanisms according to international competitions, decided the course of the economy. Falling of traditional labour collectivity and employment related disputes and working conditions along with the breakdown of economic and legal categories posed severe challenges to the stability of the working class. It was in this background Left government came to power.

Dynamic forces in the trade union life played a very decisive role in the victory of the Socialist- Communist government under Francois Mitterrand in 10 May 1981. This victory, after 23 years regime of conservative governments helped for an increase in the strength of French labour. The pro- labour policies of the government were satisfactory to the unions to a large extent. . This government provided a representative mechanism and new rights for workers and unions. The 'Auroux Reform' of the government could initiate a fundamental change in industrial relations legislation¹³¹. The law also provided the workers at least six hours a year of release time to discuss working conditions. By a series of legislatively authorised decrees the government regulated the situation of part time workers, temporary workers and the other workers not enjoying the legal benefits of full-time, permanent status. All these regulations could pacify the pungent political climate of France to a large extent.

¹³⁰ Started mainly in case of Renault factory, nationalisation was a realistic political option for the French trade unions. It enjoyed strong support among the union rank- and -file. When left was in power in 1981, it went ahead with the nationalisation process. Left government passed the Nationalisation Bill on 11 February 1982.

¹³¹ Auroux Reform provided protection for unions, particularly at the plant level, and encouraged labour and other representative mechanisms to articulate workers' grievances and managed industrial conflict'. shop stewards receive additional release time to conduct union business, and they gain the right to receive subsidized economic training. Auroux reforms also introduced an economic commission to assist the work committee in large plants.

The Act passed by the government on 4 August 1982 respecting workers' freedoms in the undertaking grants employees the right to express their views, directly and collectively, on their working conditions and the organisation of their work. French Labour Ministry has drawn up an Annual Report on collective bargaining in 1983 and an enterprise agreement in 1985, the later, for the first time, emphasised agreements on the organisation of working time than hours of work. In accordance with the Act of 13 November 1982, "Six Enterprises- airlines, iron and steel company, bank, electronics firm, supermarket chain and brewery- are obliged to conduct negotiations each year on wages, hours of work and the organisation of working time"¹³². Workers got right to express themselves on the 'content, condition and organisation' of their work. The government attempted to stimulate demand by deficit spending. They expected a worldwide economic recovery to supplement their efforts at home by the end of 1981. They initiated reforms by adding reductions in the professional tax and by increasing the appropriation for financing investment conforming to governmental priorities. It was not sufficient to satisfy middleclass aspirations of France.

Trade unions possessed their own distinct view points on changed political climate. The continuously changed situations redraw the strategies and structurally remodelled the unions. Depending on their traditions and general outlook, trade unions responded to this situation. FO viewed the appointment of communist ministers with little fear and tried to keep its longstanding policy in favour of contractual negotiations with employers. CGT stood in favour of the government but it cannot act as a government union and worked for a real change. All unions gave importance to their concerns which had problems with that of government. This increased union factionalism, a behaviour created by the crisis, created problems for the government as they lack a proper tie between government and unions. CGT and CFDT with their strong holds in small and large firms respectively considered government as an ally and no radical shift happened in their organisational structure as a part of this change. Robert Boyer states, "the very seriousness of the crisis of trade unionism opens the way to possible renewal, in keeping with the magnitude of the hopes that have traditionally been invested in the labour movement"¹³³. Attack on the well established labour regulations started in France with new methods of regulating the wage labour relation. Under the new economic policy, labour began to consider as a cost and an obstacle to the

¹³² Delamotte, Yves (1988), "Workers participation and personal policies in France", *International Labour Review*, 127(2), PP: 223.

¹³³ Boyer, Robert (1984), *The French workers movement: Economic crisis and political change*, London: George Allen and Unwin, PP: 38.

accumulation of capital. The system, termed as 'neoliberalism' opened up new avenues of capital accumulation in France.

In Europe, the Single European Market, Monetary Union and the Stability and Growth Pact cemented the turn to austerity and tight monetarism. Labour markets became more volatile, insecure and heterogeneous. Trade union membership declined and in many countries the cohesion of the trade union movement as a political actor is in doubt. Intergovernmental bodies that operate in an international space derive their legitimacy from the cooperation of sovereign governments. Union influence on them is generally low. Neither the International Monetary Fund nor the World Trade Organization provides opportunities for union participation. When European social dimension agenda was promoted by François Mitterrand and finance minister Jacques Delors, for the establishment of common labour rights and regulations within the European Community, CFDT remained as its staunch advocate throughout the 1980s.

The effect of globalization has been to break the balance of power between organized labour and organized business on which the post-war social consensus was based. The rise of transnational corporate power has been accompanied by a massive attack on all fronts like social, political, ideological and cultural aspects of the labour movement and on its values. It has also aggravated inequalities within and among countries and changed the role of the state to serve its purposes. This situation with the policies by employers and conservative governments for the increase flexibility at the expense of the unions-has seriously weakened labour movements. The trade union movement was largely unprepared for these developments and was unable to offer an adequate political response. However the actions of French workers in the later period clarified their never ending and never compromising character in social affairs. Mass Agitations against globalisation is the best example for this.

CHAPTER 4

RESPONSES THROUGH RESISTANCE:

FRENCH WORKERS IN THE ERA OF NEO-LIBERALISATION

Chapter 4

Responses through Resistance:

French Workers in the Era of Neoliberalisation.

4.1. Introduction

Neoliberalisation, contemporary manifestation of capitalist block appeared in the economic realm in the last decades of the 20th century. According to David Harvey, “neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade”.¹³⁴ The exalted status of neoliberalism in almost all economies immediately after the Second World War firstly started in the western hemisphere during the economic reconstruction period. It took the place of nationally oriented Keynesian policies. Unrestricted capital mobility and reduction of trade barriers made its triumph easy. “The neoliberal counterrevolution initially took the form of monetary restraint in order to tackle the runaway inflation that developed in most countries in the 1970s”.¹³⁵

This structural shift was a result of a paradigm shift favouring neoliberal market relations, often referred to as the rise of “market civilization”.¹³⁶ This movement toward the neoliberal utopia of a pure and perfect market is made possible by the politics of financial deregulation. And it is achieved through the transformative and, it must be said, destructive action of all of the political measures (of which the most recent is the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), designed to protect foreign corporations and their investments from national states).

Transnationalisation of production and finance in the global economy and its dominance over the sovereign states resulted in an economic slump which undermined many of the traditional bedrock practices of the labour. Restructuring employment relationships through the process like job flexibilisation, cross border flow of capital, goods and services are major elements of

¹³⁴ Harvey, David (2005), *A brief History of Neoliberalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, PP: 2

¹³⁵ Herman, Christoph (2007). “Neoliberalism in the European Union”, [Online: Web] Accessed on 20 October 2009, URL: <http://spe.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/spe/article/view/5196/2059>.

¹³⁶ Vishwas Satgar, (2007), “Cooperative Development and Labour Solidarity: a Neo-Gramscian Perspective on the Global Struggle Against Neoliberalization”, *Labour, Capital and Society* 40(1): 35-46.

this international economic order. In such an integrated global financial market system with structural adjustments and deregulated national markets, complications are comparatively high for the labourers, who are the fundamental actors of production process in every economy. Against the strength of labour, capital's primary bargaining leverage was its mobility, and so transnationalization of investment was a way to give these threat very sharp teeth.¹³⁷

Emergence of neoliberalism in 1980 was closely linked to the international economic affairs. A historical analysis is very important to understand its nature and role.

4.2. Golden age of capitalism

Neoliberalism was the culmination of the international political and economic zigzags which preceded the Second World War. As Hardy Hanappi quoted, "With this war a new constellation of economic and military powers was established itself, the rules of international relations were re-written, and a whole range of international institutions was installed aiming at re-distributing – sometimes also balancing – economic power between parts of the world".¹³⁸ Keynesianism was totally rejected.¹³⁹ Under the newly initiated system of 'embedded liberalism'¹⁴⁰, various international actors for regulation of global finance and trade became prominent. The Bretton woods settlement of 1944 can be considered as the first process in this which was a project of the capitalism to cope up with the changed international economic order to regulate international trade and monetary payments. Post war *period intensified* the need for an international currency to facilitate international trade. Free trade was promoted through fixed exchange rates under the system of US led dollar convertibility into gold. It was an essentiality for the cross border flow of dollar as a global reserve currency.

¹³⁷ Bowles, S. and H. Gintis (1986), *Democracy and Capitalism: Property, Community, and the Contradiction of Modern Social Thought*, New York: Basic Books, pp: 57.

⁵ Hardy Hanappi (2007), "The Dynamics of the Global Political Economy, The Role of Europe", Lecture delivered on 7 February 2007 at the International Conference of ANEC: Havana.

¹³⁹ Western economies after the Second World War accepted the ideas of Keynes in order to control business cycles and recession.

¹⁴⁰ The term was first used by American political scientist John Ruggie and later clarified clearly by David Harvey. By joining states, market and democratic institutions were considered as an option for better economic stability.

Hegemonic position of US economy and the shortage of foreign exchange by other countries were favourable for the Dollar to occupy the position as a means for international payment. The economic instability and the worldwide shortage of Dollars, which followed this period was solved by using various methods. "The dollar was therefore effectively used to stimulate the recovery of the capitalist world, as the US ran balance of payments deficits, initially through US Marshall Aid to Europe, and later through very high rates of military spending in Korea (the 1950s) and Vietnam (the 1960s), and increasing rates of direct foreign investment. Increase of dollar-gold exchange system intensified the expansion of international trade which uphold the free trade through Breton woods with the support of US backed military power support. This post war boom or the so-called period of 'golden age of capitalism' was backed by strong neo- Keynesian policies. In this new system neoliberal project took measures to dismantle the public sector and other state owned enterprises.

4.3. End of the post war boom

Uneven development of the post war boom period gradually resulted in a Structural crisis of 1970s. The crisis of capital accumulation made it clear that the embedded liberal ideas were a failure in providing a long lasting prosperity to capitalist world. Breakdown of Brettonwood exchange rate system intensified its crisis. Stagflation and fiscal crisis, rising unemployment and accelerating inflation shook the economies from international to domestic level and announced the failure of neo Keynesianism. Problems of US productive output outshined the dollar's international demand. Dual character of dollar as national and international currency also created contradictions.¹⁴¹ These problems reached its height with the oil crisis in 1973-74.¹⁴² Because of America's involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict oil producing countries of the Arabian world gave a big blow to Western capitalist countries by embargo which gradually them to a deeper recession. declining productivity and falling profit rates, the (relative) decline of the United States and the dollar, the rise of (economic) competitors in

¹⁴¹ Decline of the international demand of dollar mainly happened because of the decline in the share of total manufacturing goods in the world market and slow down of productivity growth.

¹⁴² Geographical disturbances created by America in the crude oil rich Middle East eventually resulted in a series of Oil crises. Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) quadrupled the oil prices after the Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur War of October 1973. The Iranian-US hostage crisis and the Iran- Iraq war again tripled the oil prices in 1980. Invasion of Kuwait by Iraq was the reason for the 1990's third price hike. The capitalist world witnessed a deep recession after these triad shocks. The devastating effect of these embargos resulted in a trade deficit and an inflation which climbed to more than 10% in a year.

Europe and Japan, increasing inflation, and social unrest throughout the world but especially in South-East Asia. A political turn across the world occurred with the so-called Washington consensus.¹⁴³ “The decision, in 1979, by the Federal Reserve to increase interest rates at any level required to curb inflation can, however, be considered as an emblematic event testifying of a deep transformation in the dynamics of capitalism.”¹⁴⁴ Neoliberalism emerged in this context after the golden age of welfare state development as a treatment for this shock to build a heaven for free market and investors. According to Gerard Dumenil and Dominique Levy, “neoliberalism was a political coup aimed at the restoration of these Privileges”.¹⁴⁵

Under this system “the state would play a minimal role in the economy and “the invisible hand” of market decisions would determine economic outcomes”¹⁴⁶. A new orientation towards market emerged with reforms and retrenchment of welfare policies. Liberalisation of international financial market was an essential requirement for the active existence of The New York investment banks for the recycling of surplus funds. “For the labour movement neoliberalism has meant the imposition of anti- union legislation, restricting and criminalising much of trade union activity”.¹⁴⁷

4.4. French Turn Towards Neoliberalism

An ideological and pragmatic repositioning materialised in the political and economic sphere of France towards the last quarter of the 20th century. Emergence of neoliberal policies as a most desirable mechanism for the regulation of economy started during this period. International financial institutions and economic advisers widely advocated neoliberal economic blueprints as the most efficient way to a stable economic system. These redesigning of political precedents values and economic discourses were an onset to accommodate or balance with the international market regulations of world capitalism. French political institutions were appropriately furnished for the smooth practicing of these

¹⁴³ John Williamson, firstly used the phrase ‘Washington consensus’, to refer the policy advises of Washington based institutions to Latin America. Ten policy instruments like fiscal discipline; public expenditure priorities in education and health; tax reform; positive but moderate market-determined interest rates; competitive exchange rates, liberal trade policies, openness to direct foreign investment; privatization; deregulation; and protection of property rights were put forward as a part of this consensus.

¹⁴⁴ Dumenuil, Gerald and Dominique Levi (2007), *Neoliberal Dyanamics*”, London: Oxford, PP: 36.

¹⁴⁵ Abid, PP: 45.

¹⁴⁶ Purcell, Mark (2008), *Recapturing Democracy ,Neoliberalization and the Struggle for Alternative Urban Futures*, Rutledge, New York, PP: 13.

policies. In other words, “the fundamental trait of the French at the end of the century is ideological innovation in which the market is rediscovered, an innovation that is truly destructive of the traditional French ideal of the economic role of the state”.¹⁴⁸

This time period was very crucial in contemporary French history as it was passing through a sharp decline in the economic and productivity growth along with high unemployment. It also marked the decline of the well celebrated ‘thirty years of glory’ (*les trente glorieuses*) of capitalist France. Worsened stagflation in the 1970’s was the key factor which compelled the state to make drastic economic policy shifts. Mitterrand demand policy of 1981 also faced collapse in pure economic sense. Replacement of state from the position as a prominent power in economic matters allowed the ceaseless flow of external factors. This disengagement got acceleration with the European Integration processes. Economic recession followed by the oil shock was very much visible in France which also resulted in a sharp decrease in the GDP. Manufacturing activities were declined considerably with expanding unemployment and exploded inflation with double digit figures.

Political legitimacy enjoyed by neoliberal projects in a global level made its ideological penetration to French economy easier. French conversion towards a more market oriented capitalism extorted the dominant place of Dirigisme¹⁴⁹ and openly attacked the state led national planning and industrial policy. France gave up its long tradition of Colbertism¹⁵⁰ which advocated government control of the balance of payments and also direct intervention in economic life. Ultimate results of these policy shifts were the introduction of extensive regulation in the labour and commodity markets with a view of free market promotion.

¹⁴⁸ Kresl, Peter Karl and Sylvain Galais (2002), *France Encounters Globalisation*, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, PP: 19.

¹⁴⁹ In its broadest sense, *dirigisme* comprises the entire centralizing tradition in French historical development, from the long reign of Louis XIV, punctuated by the rule of Napoleon, to the present day. In its narrower sense, used today, *dirigisme* refers to the central government’s role in “directing” the French economy.

¹⁵⁰ Colbertism is a 17th century economic doctrine which means, the wealth of the French economy should serve the state. Created by the French finance minister Jean- Baptiste Colbert, it emphasized that state intervention is needed to secure the large part of limited resources. This was a variety of mercantilism and applied in France between 1660 and 1683. In the golden age of mercantilism, Colbert conceived the country’s material wellbeing as subservient to its politics and the grandeur of the king and the state. His ambition was for the state to brace its energies to this end, to build up the country’s defence, to promote self-sufficiency and to pursue full employment, while maintaining standards of fairness and morality in the marketplace. Colbert’s ideas have left deep marks in the French psyche: the state embodies the common good, the organising force of society. Colbert’s principles have largely inspired French government intervention throughout the twentieth century. How these authoritarian strands were integrated with the modern French republican tradition requires some preliminary explanation.

Privatisation of national enterprises acquired momentum in a large scale with a considerable reduction in state funding mainly to the well developed public sector. France's long history of state intervention in tax, industrial and monetary policies including planning the economy and organising state enterprises left the scene with these initiatives. Deep transformation in the structure of economy considerably affected French economic policy making.

Until the early 1980's, most of the industries and banks in France were profitably running in public sector. At this time, as Guy Groux noted, "the extent of the states influence and its hegemony in the field of labour relations went beyond administrative supervision of key sectors of the economy". Shrinking of the state sector with a continuous privatisation moves subjected to a total deregulation of the economy. Jacques Chirac, within a month of forming the new government reprivatized the enterprises that had been nationalized by the Socialists during the period 1981 to 1986. His plan called for the privatization of 65 enterprises over a five year period which François Mitterrand once characterized as 'national assets'. Privatisation of three major enterprises happened in this period namely, a) "Compagnie Générale d'Electricité (CGE), an engineering and telecommunications conglomerate with a labour force of over 240 thousand and annual revenue of 130 billion francs, b) Havas, an advertising and media conglomerate and c) Société Générale, a bank which had been nationalized before the *Parti Socialiste's* nationalizations of 1982".¹⁵¹ Liberalised and internationalised French corporations learned to finance themselves in the new market by the end of the last century. Traditional industrial policies of large projects were abandoned by the state itself. These policies traditionally had a central role in countries economic development. It could not adhere its unique indicative planning. French state attempted to overcome these uncertainties by making a move towards economic liberalism. Thus "a) introducing more flexibility in the labour market; b) reducing government deficits, expenditure and taxes; c) abandoning the policy of the strong Frank, prior to 1999 and participation in the Euro, after 1999 and; d) liberalising all aspects of French economy and giving more power to market forces in accordance with the pressure from Brussels"¹⁵² became major solutions.

The profound transformations occurred in French economic realm with increased role of market and decreased role of government resulted in a structural shift in the state- labour

¹⁵¹ Watkins, Thayer (1989), "Privatization in France", [Online: Web] Accessed 25 October 2009, URL: <http://www.Sjsu.edu/faculty/Watkins/privfrance.htm>.

¹⁵² Kresl, Peter Karl and Sylvain Galais (2002), *France Encounters Globalisation*, USA: Edward Elygar Publishing Limited, PP: 77.

relationship. This power transformation gave a bludgeoning to the versed welfare state policies of France. Role of the state in relation to social security or insurance based on these so called welfare programmes were the culmination of a long term attempt. The genesis of the concept and practice of French welfare state can be found in a number of initiatives like Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1789¹⁵³ and The Resistant Charter of 1944¹⁵⁴. These welfare systems were largely drawn from Bismarck's and Beveridge's concepts of social protection¹⁵⁵ on which the administrative wheel of modern France was rotating for decades.

The institutional changes put forward by neoliberalism in an advanced economy like France reshaped traditional labour standards and power relationships. The so called post war economic miracle of the golden age ended after thirty years and the French economy was in an out of balance position. 1970's oil shock and the debt crisis of western capitalism totally restructured social and economic understandings of French Bureaucracy. Domestic financial structures were subdued by flux and uncertainty in a high manner. Labour market flexibilisation, a prominent feature of this shift was actively promoted by fixed term contracts and temporary work. Susan Milner argues that, "this uneasy mixture of state intervention and a move towards contractualisation which internalise the constrains caused by the unequal power relationships between employer and employee".¹⁵⁶ Persistently high unemployment rate and rising budget deficit became its characteristic features. Trade union unrest spread over in France could be seen as a reply to the social stresses and tensions created by this salient transformation.

Harsh fiscal austerity measures were followed by an explosive reaction of the trade unions in France. As Ronaldo Munck stated, "this is a process of change unleash by powerful economic

¹⁵³ This declaration is the fundamental document of the French revolution based on the doctrine of natural right. It is also occupying the position as a precursor document to international human rights instruments. Drafted by Immanuel Sieyes, it is a landmark in the French constitutional history. The document asserted the equality of men and the sovereignty of the people, on whom the law should rest, to whom officials should be responsible, and by whom finances should be controlled. Many of its provisions were aimed provisions were aimed at specific abuses of the ancien régime. The declaration had immense effect on liberal thought in the 19th cent.

¹⁵⁴ Formed by George Augustine Bidault the then French foreign minister, the Resistance Charter recommended an extensive post war reform programme. It demanded extensive nationalisations, a social security system and economic planning. The charter advocated a complete system of social security which would protect the worker against threats to his livelihood inherent in an industrial society.

¹⁵⁵ A bismarkian welfare state is one, which typically grants earning-related benefits, where entitlement is conditional upon a contribution record and financing by employers' and employees' contributions. the system is managed by social partners and organised in funds ("caisses" in French) more or less autonomous in regard to the state, a beveridgean system is seen as one in which benefits are directed at the whole population, are typically flat-rate and financed through taxation.

¹⁵⁶ Milner, Susan (1999) "Trade Unions", in Malcolm cook and Grace Davie (eds.) *Modern France, Society in Transition*, London: Rutledge, PP: 101.

forces but it also reflects a growing social movement of contestation”.¹⁵⁷ Trade union organisations begun to contest under the flexible financial capitalism against transformations occurred in work field like the spread of temporary and informal employment. Workers representing a wide spectrum of society showed their discontent against the way the government handled the industrial affairs. Bruno Palier argues, “most of what has happened in French social policy since the 1980s can be related to the field of path dependence-blockades, strikes and demonstrations, limited and difficult cut backs”.¹⁵⁸ French workers stubborn anti- capitalist refusals in the form of strikes showing the intensity of this problem. Mass refusals by the workers in the form of strikes shook French atmosphere in a considerable manner after the neoliberal experiments.

4.5. Strikes: The Primary and Ultimate Weapon of French Trade Unions

French Philosopher Georges Sorel is of the opinion that, “the myth of the general strike connected all the noblest, deepest, and most moving sentiments of the working class together into a coordinated picture.”¹⁵⁹ Strike waves rocked political atmosphere is always unveiling the realities and stresses of a societies’ particular time period. In France striking in factories and streets has an enormous influence and it is an integral part of their political strategies passed over by generation to generation. Deeply class rooted strikes always played a decisive role in the decision making and policy formulation in every stage of French development and also produced divergent outcomes. French constitution guarantees that, “every man may protect his rights and interests by trade union action, and belong to the union of his choice, as well as granting the right to employment and strike”.¹⁶⁰ General strikes, sometimes extremely militant, have a consciousness rising ability which can mobilised the mass against an existing institutional condition. It can be seen as a routine expression of worker’s demands. History of modern France is turbulent with mass agitations in the form of demonstrations, blockades and these are generally emerging from broader economic backgrounds. Introduction of neoliberal economic policies and its resultant protests once again proved that France is still carrying its historical legacy of strike and mass mobilisation.

¹⁵⁷ Munck, Ronaldo (2002), *Globalisation and Labour, The New Great Transformation*”, London: Zed Books Ltd, pp:11

¹⁵⁸ Palier, Bruno (2005), “Ambiguous Agreement, Cumulative Change: French Social Policy in the 1990’s”, Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Ann Thelen (eds.) *Beyond continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*, New York: Oxford University Press, PP: 127.

¹⁵⁹ Sorel, George (1950), *Reflections On violence*, New York: Collier, PP: 157.

¹⁶⁰ Milner, Susan (1999) “Trade Unions”, in Malcolm cook and Grace Davie (eds.) *Modern France, Society in Transition*, London: Rutledge, PP: 99

The puzzles of strike waves conquered French atmosphere with highly frequent and well politicised slogans as an opposition against neoliberalisation. 1995 public sector strikes against the welfare reforms, 2007 strikes against the social security cuts and the 2010 strike against the pension reforms underlining the wide spread labour discontent against the economic element of globalisation and created a frozen political atmosphere in the country. It is clearly visible that, after 1980s, majority of the trade union protests in France pension carry some basic similarities. Pension reform policies are the most heated debate among this. An over view of this policy is essential to understand the depth of present problem.

4.6. French Pension Policy

Pension reform processes always invited wide range of confrontations in France and as Paul Pierson has labelled, it is “the politics of permanent austerity.”¹⁶¹ It is also a heated issue in discussions related to the recasting of Particular French social model. The debate over French pension reform between administrative authorities and trade unions made it a highly sensitive political exercise. “Due to growing financial strains, an inequitable distribution of costs and benefits between generations and socio-economic groups, ineffective responses to new forms of social exclusion and problems of economic competitiveness, pensions have been at the core of public debates on recasting welfare”¹⁶².

Pension system is generally regarded as the largest single item of public expenditure. French democracy’s old age security expansion was one of the most stable and remarkable social security features in the post war period. In France during the so-called golden age of pensions, notably 1970s and 80s, the state progressively provided pension benefits including its expansion. French pension system is generally considering as a hard one to change. The pension system is mainly based on employer’s fund with legally mandatory ‘pay-as-you-go scheme’ (PAYG) as the core of the system. Under this system the contributions of the working populations are immediately redistributed to pay current pensions. On the average, 70per cent of retired people’s income comes from legally mandatory PAYG arrangements. Giuliano Bonoli explains, “French people contribute during their working life to obtain a generous pension, which represents on average 70% of their previous earnings, and are

¹⁶¹ Pierson, “Conclusion,” in Pierson, ed., *The New Politics of the Welfare State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001

¹⁶² Natali, David and Martin Rhodes (2004), “Trade-off and Veto Players: Reforming Pensions in France and Italy”, *French Politics*, 2(2), PP: 1-23.

strongly attached to pensions that they consider as a deferred wage”.¹⁶³ The retirement pension has been conceptualised not only as the product of contributions but also as a deferred wage reward for career efforts. French pension schemes were managed by the social actors with Keynesian concepts, who considered social security as a major characteristic of political and economic regulation. “The pension scheme in particular have been at the core of the political regulation as they have integrated trade unions into the social field in return for their relative exclusion from the political and economic spheres”¹⁶⁴

This welfare retrenchment in the form of social security cuts or reduction of spending mainly targeted the pension schemes of workers. After 1980s this progressive system started to face financial sustainability problems and its social and redistributive dimension began to collapse under the changed social and economic environment. France is a greying country with substantial increase in the older population size and pension schemes are very important for the stability of its citizens. Degree of the maturity of the pension schemes, transformation of labour market, employment and unemployment rights are the common were emerged in this context as challenges in relation with pension reform. The main confrontation against this was raised by trade unions (See ANNEXURE 2)

Rather than pension, neoliberal policies generated some great pressure on other social security systems also. Its effect on economic affairs gradually undermined French wage policy. “A wages policy is only feasible in a democracy if it is accepted by trade union leaders on behalf of the workers whom it directly affects”. But the relation between working-class political and industrial power and the feasibility of a national wages policy invited wide range of discontent among the workers. Neoliberal reforms negatively affected solidaristic wage policies of France. It has been beset by the reform and trade unions lost the power to take part in its implementation. In France the state was drawing the labour legislations mainly on the basis of trade union demand. Neoliberal policies also challenged this special relationship with the trade unions, which positively developed in post war period.

In this way neoliberalisation eliminated the basic underlying structural causes of social cohesion and its resultant unequal effects on social life led France to a chaotic situation.

¹⁶³ Bonoli, Giuliano (2005), *Ageing and Pension Reform Around the World: Evidence from Eleven Countries*, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, PP: 74.

¹⁶⁴ Bozec, Geraldine and Claire Mays (2001), “Pension Reform in France”, [Online: Web] Accessed on 29 October 2009, URL: [http:// www. iccr-international .org/pen-ref](http://www.iccr-international.org/pen-ref).

These entire crises culminated in massive trade union strikes for the protection of social security system.

4.7. 1995 Strikes

Anti-neoliberal struggles got a momentum in France with the 1995 protest movements. It erupted as a counterblast by the public sector workers against the Jacques Chirac- Alian Juppé ministries' welfare reforms, which came as a part of the French 'Social Protection System'¹⁶⁵. On 15th November 1995, prime minister Alian Juppés' statement in the National Assembly emphasised the need to reduce country's public deficit to keep equality with other European Community countries. The plan includes:

- A new tax of 0.5 % on pre-tax income to reduce the public debt
- The removal of a 20% tax allowance given to all employees
- A radical restructuring of the health system, which increased charges for public hospitals
- Changes to retirement and superannuation schemes
- A reduction of funding for universities and education
- New fiscal reforms affecting inflation and savings
- A massive restructuring of the public transport system, including the national railways.

Jacques Chirac's Neo- Gaullist government put forward these Welfare cutback proposals in order to reduce the deficit of social security system with the full endorsement of International Monetary Fund (IMF). "The plan also called for raising the number of years before state workers could have access to their pensions and for transferring control over social expenditure, particularly in healthcare, from employer/employee organisations to the government- reforms designed to bring France in line with the international financial establishment".¹⁶⁶ The reforms under the plan were bounded by financial and economic uncertainties. Juppé plan put forward two principle plans; "to improve the financial

¹⁶⁵ The right to social protection is recognised in the preamble of French constitution. Its current form was introduced after the Second World War. The basic principle of this system includes universality, all- englobing, solidarity, equal management; French social protection system includes laws on the financing of social security, reforming pensions, creating the universal medical coverage programme, etc. - The system also developed significant social welfare activities.

¹⁶⁶ Ross, Kristin (2002), *May 1968 and its Afterlives*, USA: Chicago University Press, PP: 208.

sustainability of the welfare system through an increase in revenues and a reduction of expenditure; and to progressively reorient system-funding away from social insurance towards general taxation, one objective of which was to alleviate the burden of social charges on firms”¹⁶⁷ The principal aim of the pension reform was to fully extend the 1993 Balladur reform to both the private and public sectors in their entirety. The major reason behind the reform was the implementation of cuts required under the Maastricht treaty.¹⁶⁸ Cutting public spending is the generally following policy of the capitalist model of policy changing. By cutting the public spending in accordance with the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty, the plan proposed for the reduction of budget deficit from 5% to 3%.

In November-December 1995, French streets witnessed a violent disruption with great popular support.¹⁶⁹ In order to smash the strike Jacques Chirac and Juppe adopted the strategy of non-negotiation. The strike was strengthened by public, private and semi- public workers like France Telecom, SNCF (Société Nationale des Chemins de fer français), RATP, Air France and Air Inter. more and more tensed climate of 1995. The end of ‘Trente Glorieuses’ and the ‘Dirigisme’ .The French leading news paper *Le Monday* wrote, “we are witnessing today in reality a strike against globalisation, a massive and collective reaction against financial globalisation and its consequences”.¹⁷⁰ Railway workers under SNCF were at the forefront of the strike and it was strengthened by overwhelming participation of postal and transport workers, teachers, church leaders, news paper sellers and university students. On 12 December, French social scientist Pierre Bourdieu addressed the railway workers at Gare Du Nord in Paris and stated, “we must retake democracy against the technocracy. We must finish with the tyranny of 'experts' from the World Bank and the IMF, who impose on us the verdicts of the new Leviathan - the financial markets - who don't listen or negotiate, but only explain what's good for us”.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Natali, David and Martiin Rhodes (2004), “Trade-off and Veto Players: Reforming Pensions in France and Italy”, *French Politics*, 2(2), PP: 12.

¹⁶⁸ Maastricht criteria forced national governments to cut the budget deficit, public debt and inflation. This has achieved at a high social cost resulting in a net transfer of income and wealth from labour to capital. This followed the measures oof privatisation and deregulation. This treaty was consciously used to slash social spending and attack the pension system.

¹⁶⁹ It is reported that during the strike there was high demand for the books related to Paris Commune. French citizens became highly enthusiastic about their revolutionary past.

¹⁷⁰le-monde-(1968), [Online: Web] Accessed on 20 October 2009, URL: <http://www.workersliberty.org/blogs/edwardm/2008/05/21/le-monde-article-22-may-transport-strike-0>

¹⁷¹Spratt, David, (1996), “France After the Strikes”, [Online: Web] Accessed on 15 October 2009, URL: <http://www.mail-archive.com/pen-l@galaxy.csuchico.edu/msg10081.html>

The strike created massive traffic jams which hit the transport system heavily. Government authorities characterised the strikes as “archaic in their wishes and concerns, stubborn, clinging to the past, anachronistic, out of touch with global realities, dinosaur like and conservative”.¹⁷²

The subsequent 1995 Juppé austerity plan failed because it targeted their more powerful public-sector counterparts instead. Confrontational reform approach adopted by Juppe failed. With the dropping of retirement reform plan the strikes ended. 'Le Monde Diplomatique' stated, “By their incredible revolt in December 1995, the French have collectively shown, for the first time, their rejection of a society based on economism, on uncontrolled liberalism, the totalitarianism of the market and the tyranny of globalization. They reminded their leaders about an old republican principle: citizens prefer disorder to injustice.”¹⁷³ This five week lasted public sector strike of 1995 ultimately made a profound effect on French working class consciousness.

4.8. 2007 strikes in France

France in 2007 was gripped by a massive strike movement against the social security cuts initiated under President Nicolas Sarkozy and Prime Minister Francois Fillon. Government declared that harmonisation of pension is a necessary measure for the financial stability of the country. Trade unions considered this political strategy as an attempt to reduce early retirement benefit and a roll back of trade union protection. For Trade unions these reforms were the vicious attack on the basic rights of workers.

The strike began in the northern city of Lille by cancelling trains. SNCF and Paris Metro workers were the first group of strikers. GDF (Natural Gas Company) and EDF (Utility Company) actively took part in the strike which reduced countries' national electricity production to 10% and cut the capacity of nuclear plants. This industrial action of transport and energy workers paralysed countries free movements. Strike was strengthened by the active participation of air traffic controllers, teachers, and postal workers. University Students were also protesting against the privatisation moves and funding plans of the right wing government. Nicolas Sarkozy during the early days of union disputes stated, “we will not

¹⁷² Ross, Andrew and Kristin Ross (2004), *Anti- Americanism*, USA: New York University Press, PP: 151.

¹⁷³ Spratt, David (1996), “France After the Strikes”, [Online: Web] Accessed 2 October , 2009 URL: <http://www.mail-archive.com/pen-l@galaxy.csuchico.edu/msg10081.html>

surrender and we will not retreat...France needs reforms to meet the challenges imposed on it by the world".¹⁷⁴

Strikes on the Paris opera house and comedie Francaise (national theatre company) showed their discontent on retirement packages by cancelling 17 ballet performances. Musicians, ballet dancers and actors were the main sections affected by these reforms. Numbers of the performances were considerably decreased because of the stage hand and lighting workers strike. SUD (Solidaires Unitaires Démocratiques) and FSU (Fédération syndicale unitair) were leading the opera house strikes.

End of special regime for pensions invited wide range of protest from rail workers and electricity workers. Unlimited strike started by the militant railway unions led the country to immobility. 73.5% of SNCF workers (railways) joined the strike, compared to 67% at the height of strike of 1995 RATP (metro, bus suburban rail) reported 58% observance; EDF 51.9%, 8% of civil servants and 10% of teachers.¹⁷⁵ Transport system was completely shut down. SNCF raised demands including; a) an end to irreversible decisions reducing the capacity of SNCF, b) a commitment that SNCF will not be privatised, c) an end of job losses, d) a programme of recruitment should be set in place for the years to come, the entire network should be respected, including the maintenance of non-profitable routes, an increase in salary and pension provisions of 1.8%.

Trade unions and workers took the plan of government to introduce obligations over them to maintain a minimum service during the strikes as an attack against their right to strike. Government suggested in August 2007 that workers should be obliged to work six hours per day for maintaining minimum services. The government passed this 'Minimum Service Law' with an intention to prevent social disturbances during the strikes. It states that the would-be strikers should inform their managers about their participation 48 hours before the strikes. Resistance against this law was very huge but the strike waves yielded without getting any benefit for the unions.

The trade unions could not win their entire demands but it resulted in many positive aspects. Once again the strike proved the strength of organisation. They never fell into disappointment.

¹⁷⁴ Stratto, Allegra (2007), "Sarkozy defiant over French strikes", [Online: Web] Accessed on 12 October , 2009 URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/nov/20/france.allegrastratton>.

¹⁷⁵ Costello, Jef (2007), "France: Strikers Paralyse Paris Region", [Online: Web] Accessed October 30, 2009 URL: <http://libcom.org/news/france-strikers-paralyse-paris-region-18102007>

4.9. 2010 Strikes

The political atmosphere of France in 2010 ruptured with a series of protest against Nicolas Sarkozy's unpopular pension reform plan (See ANNEXURE 3). All major French cities were paralysed by a wave of trade unions' strike action against the government plan for the gradual increase of countries retirement age from 60 to 62 by 2018 (See ANNEXURE 4)The pension reform bill aims at reducing public spending invited mass disruption from both public and private sector workers. Government is of the opinion that the bill is needed to curb the pension's deficit and to reduce debt. The mass protest against the pension reforms of Nikolas sarkozy in many ways is a continuation of the 1995 strikes. Lengthen the number of years for the employment and reduce retirement pension is unacceptable for the workers. Population ageing and pension reform will have profound effects on international capital markets. It portrays the Balladur pension reform of 1993 as a peak level agreement between social and political actors. Facing a major economic crisis and a record public debt (80% of GDP), the capitalist class has no choice but to attack all our social gains.

After presidential election victory of Nikolas Sarkozy in May 2007, he put forward a very clear mandate; "put France back to work, or at least change the way it works by ending the culture of labour entitlement and encouraging entrepreneurship and employment".¹⁷⁶ The retirement reform bill was passed after a three-week debate, amid massive nationwide protests. The National Assembly, France's lower house, voted the bill through by 336 votes to 233. The upper house, the Senate, backed the bill by 177 to 151 on Tuesday. The governing centre-right UMP party stated in the National Assembly that, "If we don't act then the deficit in the pension system will hit 20 billion Euros in 2010, 45 billion in 2020 and probably 70 billion Euros in 2030".¹⁷⁷ The government insists the reform is essential as people live longer, and it has urged people to show "courage" as it tries to chip away at the huge national debt. The Europe's second economic power is suffering a pension deficit of over 30 billion Euros (39.9 billion U.S. dollars), therefore the government claimed the reform vital in saving the country from going broke. Labor Minister Eric Woerth stated that, the reform is important for the French public interest because the pension system is causing huge money-lose to the country. So for government the reform to the money-losing pension system is an "obligation,"

¹⁷⁶ Kheiriddin, Tasha (2007), "Mal a Droite: Can Sarkozy Right, What's Wrong with France?" [Online: Web] Accessed 29 October 2009 URL: <http://www.irpp.org/po/archive/jun07/kheiriddin.pdf>.PP:46.

¹⁷⁷ Hallam, Mark (2010), "French Workers Strike en masse against Sarkozy's pension Reform", [Online: Web] Accessed 8 November 2009 URL: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,5982319,00.html>.

In June 2007 Sarkozy introduced a power structure reorganisation of state run institutions in accordance with the guidelines of RGPP (General Review of Public Policies) with the aim of cutting public spending. Through the elimination of lower level or local administrative outlets and positions, the merging of various administrative bodies and the introduction of private sector style management were its major intentions.

President Nicolas Sarkozy proclaimed his reforms related to the Pension, social and civil service are the biggest in decades but trade unions claimed that it will lead to a general deterioration of pension's provision[See Appendix 2] Increased life expectancy of the French people and the government argues this could save 70 billion Euros (90 billion dollars) by 2030 at a time when France's public deficit -- at around eight percent of GDP -- is well above the euro zone target of three percent. "What's at stake here is the future of the entire retirement system in our country," said Jean-Francois Cope, the leader of Sarkozy's majority UMP in the National Assembly, where lawmakers were to debate the law later in the day. Reality is that, the government gave tax cut when France is running through a high budget deficit (8% in 2010), which is closer to that of Greece (9%) than Germany (5%). Its gross public debt is forecast to be 85% this year. And it is under pressure from the credit-ratings agencies to send a strong message of its determination to get a grip on public finances.

The conservative government's bill to push back eligibility for retirement and pension benefits along with the constantly deteriorating work and life of the labours again shifted the French environment. The right wing Sarkozy government wants to increase the minimum retirement age to 62 with 42 years of social security payments, and the pension age to 67. The economic crisis of the last two years has increased the state debt to 80% of GDP and the ruling class wants to make the workers pay for it. After handing out billions of euro to the banks now the state hopes to "save" 70 billion euro with this attack on pension rights.

Less regulation and more privatisation policy of the Government clearly marking the failure of social dialogue in France. The global economic crisis resulted in France's deficit and state debt increase and the president knows renouncing the reform risks losing France its coveted AAA credit rating, which allows it to finance public debt at low market rates.

4.10. Tax Cut for the Rich

Trade unions are accusing Sarkozy for protecting the rich through his earlier tax cuts by making the middle and working classes pay for the pension's shortfall. His first major reform

was a package of tax cuts which intended to provide a "shock of confidence" to boost growth. As early as August 2007, the new administration pushed a "fiscal package" worth 15 billion Euros for tax breaks. It also capped personal tax at 50 percent to encourage rich expatriates to return home and spark investment. Instead, the nearly €14 billion per year package tied up a budget that already has a €41 billion deficit. Economists now say the tax cut looks more like a sop to the rich than an economic stimulus, and criticize the self-styled "purchasing-power president" for failing to see the core problem wasn't consumer spending, but helping companies become more competitive by eliminating or reducing rigid labour laws.¹⁷⁸ For the rich and the very rich, this package included a lowering of the maximum income tax rate from 60% to 50% and taxes break on inherited wealth (2 billion Euros). For big and small bosses, the package included three measures designed to facilitate workforce management: a tax break on overtime work (4-6 billion Euros), one on student jobs (40 million Euros), and a reform of the guaranteed minimum income making it financially more attractive for its recipients to accept part-time work (6-8 billion Euros). Thomas Klau, head of the Paris office of the European Council on Foreign Relation says, "The price for wresting capitalism from collapse is paid by the poorer and weaker sectors of society rather than those most responsible for the collapse, who continue to derive the most benefit from the system."¹⁷⁹

4.11. Workers strike

For workers the reform is a socially regressive measure. An increase in the retirement age is a highly regressive cut that will hit working people hardest. Poorer workers have shorter life expectancies and would lose a higher proportion of their retirement years. Workers who have to retire early because of unemployment or other hardships will take a benefit cut as a result of this change.

Workers held their first strike on Sept. 7 when the National Assembly started debating the bill. Since the early September the strike against the policies of neoliberalism gained overwhelming support against the inflexible attitude of the French government. French people across the country walked off jobs and took part in sizeable demonstrations. Join an unprecedented new protest movement by private sector workers from banks and supermarkets to multinationals. The "reform" of the pensions system is an attack that affects all sections of the working class. Managerial role of trade union as a social partner raised potential opposition against the pension reform in the initial stage itself. On six separate "Days of Action," from

¹⁷⁸ Debbaut, Karl (2007), "Biggest Public Transport Strike Since 1995", [Online: Web] Accessed 30 October 2009 URL: <http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/2904>.

¹⁷⁹ Traub, James (2010), "The spectacle of the society", ", [Online: Web] Accessed 29 October 2009 URL: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/10/22/the_spectacle_of_the_society?print=yes&hidecomments=yes&page=full

September 7 through October 19, workers shut down most major government and private-sector workplaces. France trade union membership is concentrated in public sector, railway, air traffic and education. From all these sectors around three million or more marched in protest in big and medium-size cities and even small towns.

According to PCF representative Greg Oxley, “the legislation on pensions, which has now been voted by the National Assembly, deals a serious blow to workers' rights and effectively opens up retirement provision as a "market" for the capitalist insurance companies”.¹⁸⁰ FO leader Jean- Claude Mailly states, “it is our duty to protect the population and roll back moves that are unjust, that penalise the poorest of the poor”.¹⁸¹ The struggle entered its decisive phase after the passing of bill and marked with the active participation of all the French trade unions.

The oil strike always played as a most powerful weapon in the hands of French workers. The strikes have shut down 12 oil refineries in France and led to shortages of diesel and gasoline. French oil giant Totals' announcement of job cuts just after reporting record profits was the reason behind this. Strikes forced the closure of all six of the Total oil group's refineries, threatening fuel shortages. In the oil terminal port of Fos-Lavera near Marseilles, the eighteen days strike left oil tankers stranded at sea unable to unload their cargoes. Fuel supplies of all France's 12 refineries were hit since refinery workers joined the nationwide demonstration called by trade unions. French energy supply is highly affected by these strikes. French truckers blocked highways and cutting fuel supplies. Refinery strike dried countries service stations and around 1,500 gas stations had run out of fuel.

Truck drivers, which have a tradition of having blockaded the country before on several occasions, also announced its participation in the movement. Truck drivers carried out “Opérations Escargot” (snail-paced driving) on the main highways, keeping traffic at a crawl (See ANNEXURE 4). Protests and blockades from the trucking industry have put the squeeze on fuel supplies across France. Truck drivers staged go-slow operations on highways and it blocked off major roads access to key sites and major bridges connecting France to European motorways. Dominique de Villepin, a former prime minister, has warned the government that mass unemployment, falling living standards and the constant provocations of the Sarkozy government could provoke a new social revolution. Trade unions are criticising the

¹⁸⁰ Oxley, Greg (2003), “The Recent Strikes and Mass Demonstartions in France”, [Online: Web], Accessed on 13 November 2009, UR: http://www.marxist.com/Europe-old/fra_strike_0703.html

¹⁸¹ Naravane, Vaiju (2010),”French Furry”, [Online: Web], Accessed on 15 November 2009, URL: <http://www.frontline.in/fl2723/stories/20101119272301000.htm>

government by saying that, the government poured millions of Euros to multinationals and wants to recover the money at the expense of the vast majority of the population.

2009 January 29 around one million workers both civil servants and private sector workers occupied the streets. An FO union leader says, “all the statistics are red. Employment, purchasing power, salaries, but also industrial production, economic growth, exports. And workers feel their horizons are blocked. And that’s without mentioning their fears concerning pensions and health insurance”.¹⁸²

The struggle against the attack on pensions showed that the immense majority of the population are opposed to this counter-reform (See **ANEXURE 5**). The participation in the main days of mobilisation was as many as 3.5 million demonstrators. Sarkozy called the clashes "scandalous" and said rioters would be punished. The chemical workers section of CGT states, “each of us must therefore do as much as possible to ensure that the struggles are extended throughout our country, both to gain victory and to stop the repressive attacks on the right to strike and the right to defend oneself in France”.¹⁸³

According to Metellus Jerome, this movement is the answer to all those sceptics who, for the last 30 years, have made speeches on the "powerlessness" and "atomisation" of the working class, even about its "disappearance".¹⁸⁴ Passing the controversial in both houses of parliament unleashed an unprecedented mass protest. 20% of countries population including the school children were striking in the streets to protect their hard won rights. For workers the proposals are unjust and for government it is imperative and urgent because of the changing demographic patterns. CFTD leader Francois Cherque says, “this proposal is unjust because it penalises two categories of workers who find themselves on the lowest rung of the ladder- manual workers and women”.¹⁸⁵ Nikolas Sarkozy’s tax breaks to rich made the scene again worse. France is a country with high unemployment rate and increasing the retirement age will again worsen the youth unemployment in the shrinking job market. Workers are of the opinion that it will not balance the overall debt of the country. Reports

¹⁸² Rougetel, Antoine and Lantier, Alex (2008), “France Trade Unions Warn Government against Social Explosion”, [Online: Web], Accessed on 10 November 2009, URL: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2008/sep2008/frans02.shtml>.

¹⁸³ Oxley, Greg (2003), “The Recent Strikes and Mass Demonstrations in France”, [Online: Web], Accessed 13 November 2009, UR: http://www.marxist.com/Europe-old/fra_strike_0703.htm.l

¹⁸⁴ Jerome, Metellus (2010), “France: Battle over Pensions- Bring the Economy to a Halt”, [Online: Web], Accessed on 22 October 2010, URL: <http://www.marxist.com/france-battle-over-pensionsbring-economy-to-a-halt.htm>.

¹⁸⁵ Naravane, Vaiju (2010), “French Furry”, [Online: Web], Accessed 15 November 2009, URL: <http://www.frontline.in/fl2723/stories/20101119272301000.htm>.

shows that only 39% of people are gainfully employed as compared to the European average of 48% and only 17% of the 60- 64 age group are in active service.¹⁸⁶ This reality along with a sharply declining industrial outputs and relocation plans of major French industries to cheap labour available places intensifying French peoples fear about future work.

4.12. Conclusion

“One of the most salient features of the 1990s is an unprecedented increase in social inequality and an intensification of exploitation of both people and nature in an increasingly naked pursuit of profit”.¹⁸⁷ This exploitation occurred in France through the introduction of neoliberalisation which largely retraced the Power relations of France. The post war welfare system disappeared under this new financial hegemony and it marked a shift in the nature and role of the state. By revealing the distinctive political, economic and ideological characteristics it made the neo liberal market oriented labour reforms. The new actors at international level like TNCs and MNCs applied their agendas both at the theoretical and practical level with the full blessings of state power. French neoliberalisation always tried to adjust itself with international financial fluctuations and recessions by heavy impositions on the working class. Massive austerity programme propagated by these actors after the structural adjustments period again and again fuelled workers discontent. Large scale privatisation and labour flexibilisation from the initial stage itself fuelled the anger and frustration of trade unions. All these institutional expressions showed that trade unions have regained its powerful position. Aimed at stopping governments attack on pensions and other social welfare measures trade unions entered into the arena of protests. Their response was not silent and it finds expression in mass strikes. The Guardian reported that, “when they speak loudly, the French are used to being listened to”.¹⁸⁸ A detailed analysis of the French trade union strikes made it clear that France is still carrying its great tradition of striking. According to Strange, “neoliberalism is not a natural human condition, it is not supernatural, it can be challenged

¹⁸⁶ Naravane, Vaiju (2010), “French Furry”, [Online: Web], Accessed on 15 November 2009, URL: <http://www.frontline.in/fl2723/stories/20101119272301000.htm>

¹⁸⁷ Gill, S (2000), Theoretical foundations of a neo-Gramscian Analysis of European integration. In: *Dimensions of a critical theory of European Integration*. Marburg: University of Marburg, PP: 28.

¹⁸⁸ Agnes, Poirier (2009), “Three strikes and you’re out, Sarko”, [Online: Web] Accessed 3 November 2009 URL: <http://WWW.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/mar/20/france-nicolas-sarkozy>.

and replaced because its own failures will require this".¹⁸⁹ So challenging the elements of neoliberalisation is very important for unions because it is mainly challenging their rights. French trade unions struggle clarifies the importance of organised actions of the working class. The French people always took different protest routes. Traditional way of expressing discontent reached its zenith in the anti neoliberal strikes. State labour relationships in France shaped through the continuous strategic interactions and its maintenance is a necessary element for the working class.

¹⁸⁹ Strange, S (1999), "A Short History of Neoliberalism", [Online: Web] Accessed on 29 November 2009 URL: <http://www.globalpolicy.org>

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

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French, a country generally known as the mother of revolutions, always extracted the essence of universal philosophies and tried to apply it in their own political sphere. France was the ploughed field of ideologies ranging from utopian socialism, communism, anarchism, capitalism, post modernism and so on. The impact of all these intellectual discourses deeply rooted in France and considerably influenced its social movements by giving flesh and marrow in every historical stages of its development. Trade union movement also absorbed this tradition and occupied the position as a conclusive factor in the world working class movement. It took intransigent positions towards political and economic matters of the state and provided potential antidote to all malefic elements of the society.

The historical legacy of France dates back to the period of French revolution and Paris Commune with installed France in the zenith of social movements and revolutions. The country passed through five republics and in every stage trade unions concussed the bureaucratic paralogisms with scrupulous stands for the benefit of workers. These kinds of highly politicised acts of unions made the life of working class secure.

Now, the neoliberal policy reforms, introduced in almost all parts of Europe worsened the labour standards. French states turn towards neoliberal policies crushed the traditional behaviour patterns of the employment. These drastic policy changes, in their attempt to accommodate labour in changing economic and demographic context are challenging the existence of trade unions. The turn of France towards neoliberal policies during the period of Francois Mitterrand impoverished countries working class. French governments attack on the most cherished social protections can be seen as a part of French capitalisms survival mechanism.

A study of trade unions historical development shows that attack against the workers always existed in the society. The change is only in time period and situations. Capitalism cannot stand without exploiting the basic factor of production process that is the labour. In this sense, capitalist development is not possible without destroying the organisational strength of labour. Policy formulations to restrict the free working of organisation can take as an instance for this. By giving power to private firms and reducing the role of state, it started an open attack on labour laws, minimum wage and health securities.

Under this, financial balancing of the welfare system became important through the reduction of social deficits. Handling of social security issues only in financial terms by applying pure economic logic is the basic reason behind this. In this system, dismantling of all collective structures like trade unions are very important for the existence of capitalism.

Now, France has entered a period of social instability and class struggle. Strikes are the highest expressions of class struggle against these instabilities. The agitations are taking place against the background of a fundamental shift in the specific weight of the contending classes over recent decades. In the era of neoliberalisation French working class are in streets to secure their hard won labour right. Workers are the prominent sections severely affected by neoliberal economic policies and its onerous practices ignited the trade union movements. All the major trade union including CGT, CFDT and FO, despite their ideological stand started mass agitations. For the first time truly mass struggles were waged to give concrete institutional expression to the socialist project of expropriating the means of production and transforming the relations of production

The struggle against counter-reform and against attacks on the public sector came to a head in March 2000, when simultaneous strike action by teachers and Finance Ministry workers plunged the government into a major crisis. Economic growth has not made any significant impact on the most pressing problems of society. There is a widespread feeling that the "fruits of economic growth" have not been shared with the working people. The boom has therefore increased social discontent. In 2007, wave of protest comes in the wake of the mass riots of desperate and poverty-stricken youth that flared up in the working class suburb. The 2010 strikes are the strict working class warning against the pension reform. Retirement age increase and pension cut are the first step in all structural adjustment programmes. But for French workers taking two year from their life means an attack on their birth and fundamental right.

In this context worker's strike for the defence of their social rights becoming the historical mission of trade unions. What France needs is a fundamental break in the current political situation. Global development adjustments could not have any benefit to majority of the workers. Instead it has reproduced and deepened patterns of uneven development and inequality.

France turn towards a more neoconservative stand with the presidency of Nikolas Sarkozy and it gave tremendous opportunity to the agents of neoliberalisation to carry out the polices

without any obstacles. In this situation, against the Cataclysmic failure of social security system including pension and retirement benefits, France is now showing some of its old cultural reflexes through unions. It is very clear that a neoliberal oriented policies obviously denying the possibilities for an alternative form of development co-existence in France. This issue posing the question of how organized labour has responded to increasing economic globalization. Trade unions now engaged in the mission for the articulation of labour strength and social responsibilities.

Political insecurities spread over in France are the clear reflections of financial jeopardy of the neoliberal policies. For working class, what is happening in the name of reforms are mere counter reforms. Because for them it is a reality that such policies mainly benefit only to the wealthiest people. The moderate or total disengagement of stage from the financial affairs cannot provide any benefit to working class. Strong sinewy retaliation of the French workers against these welfare cut backs revealing a yawning gap between elite French technocrats and the nation's unionised work force.

In this situation, a number of ideological debates occurred in France with regard to neoliberalism. All the major trade unions are underlining the fact that Capitalism has come to mean permanent social attacks. Its distinctive modes and expressions are completely liable to the superiority of individualised and market based competition. It considering market as the source and arbiter of rights. Politically, the economic freeze and the rise in unemployment have come at a dangerous time. The reduced spending has discouraged business investment and cost jobs, further reducing consumer confidence. Early retirement rules and high unemployment which mean that the burden of producing wealth falls on a relatively small section of the population. How to raise creativity and productivity without destroying the services sector remains an unsolved and relevant question in this time.

Neoliberalism's political and ideological manifestation in the form of economic structural change and public policy innovation at national level are the major threat to the security of unions. Trade unions recognised neoliberalism as a major driving force behind all kind of inequalities in the society. Struggles are making it clear that trade unions are not at all ready to adjust with these policy shifts. Both public and private sector workers participate in the strike in a large scale. The destruction of pensions affects practically everyone, except the rich. But beyond the question of pensions this movement revealed a deep discontent within French society.

The changing scenario of French political economy clearly reflecting in the trajectory of trade union movement. Because the strikes are aiming the total political shifts of the country. Globalisation had narrowed the scope for a voluntaristic role for the state. Rising level of unemployment and the very low level of wage system, increase in the number of contract labours are the result of wide economic restructuring. In this deregulated economy, measures such as privatisation changed the working condition dramatically. Striking against these elements means unionists are maintaining a close connection with political affairs.

Struggle against the elements of globalisation in France raising many questions about the role of trade unions also. It is a common argument that trade unions are losing their hold among the workers. France is a country with minimum union participation in Europe. Large scale privatisation can be considered as a reason for this. In private enterprises there is a strong restriction towards union membership and activities. Remaining it as a reality strike waves made it clear that, union membership number did not affected strength of protest.

To conclude, present study tried to cover trade union movement in the context of neoliberalisation of the French economy. It tried to analyse the role and nature of trade union movement in the liberal economic context. The analysis made it clear that the introduction of these policies intensified the agitations against the wide range of reforms and social security cuts.

Anti globalisation struggle's transformation into a national level agitation is a notable shift happened in France after 1980s. What is reflecting through this struggle is the return of labour strength after a decade's long sterility. These struggles eliciting the sense of rights and social consciousness of the French people. The agitations showing that, capitalist rhetoric of the end of the ideology and end of social movements are not easily applicable in the case of France. Anarchist union's protest in the Bastille and large scale selling of political theory books and even the participation of church priests are showing the same thing.

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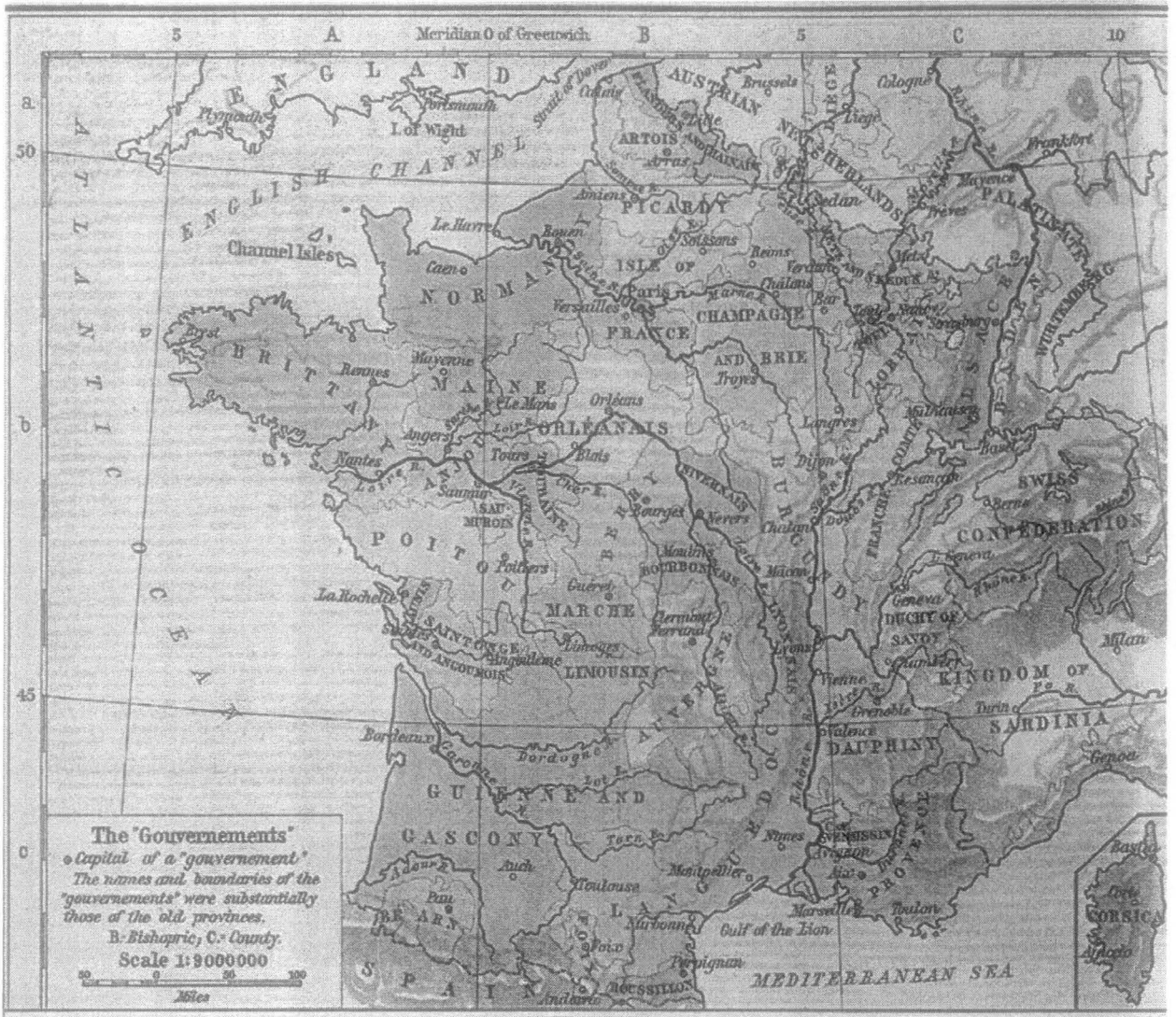
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MAPS

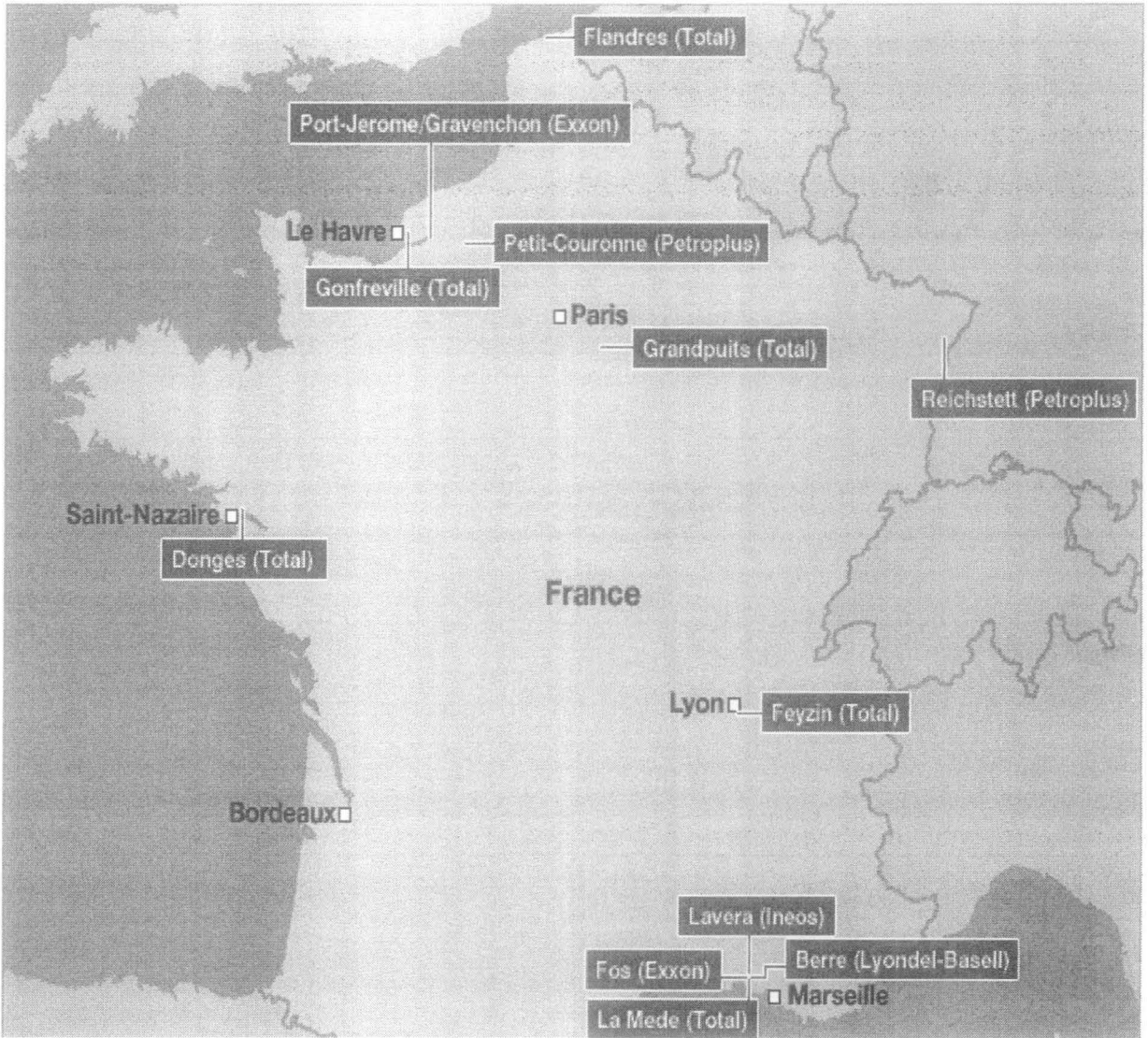


Map 1 France in 1789 during French revolution



Map 2 Modern France

France's 12 oil refineries



Map 3 Major oil Refineries in France.

ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE 1

Students protest in France. [Source: Cafebabel, 23 May 1968]



[Source: Frontline, November 19, 2010]

French fury

There is anger in France over Nicolas Sarkozy's move to push up the retirement age by two years.

BY VAIJU HARAVANE IN PARIS

The hole in the public pension system has been created by the fact that France has an ageing population, which means there are **more pensioners than workers who pay into the pension fund.**

IN France, both Houses of Parliament have passed the controversial Bill on pension reform and, in a month's time, when President Nicolas Sarkozy will have promulgated it, it will become law. Henceforth the French will have to retire not at 60, as is at present the case, but at 62, and in some cases even 67, in order to get a full pension.

The right-wing President's plans to raise the retirement age have unleashed unprecedented passions and anger, and there have been regular strikes and mass demonstrations since the new school year began in September. The protests have been so widespread that on several occasions, as many as three million people, or 20 per cent of the country's population, have been out in the streets, demonstrating.

And the protests have not died down, now that the Bill is poised to become law. Even though the



numbers have begun to dwindle, the anger and frustration remain, and unions have said the protests will continue, the aim now being the ouster of President Sarkozy in the elections to be held in May 2012. The opposition Socialists have promised they will repeal the law raising the retirement age should they come to power.

"Just because an unjust proposal has become law because the ruling right-wing coalition has an absolute majority in the Lower House and a substantial majority in the Senate does not mean we have to accept it. It is our duty to protect the population and roll back moves that are unjust, that penalise the poorest of the poor," said Jean-Claude Mailly, president of the Force Ouvriere (Workers' Strength) trade union.

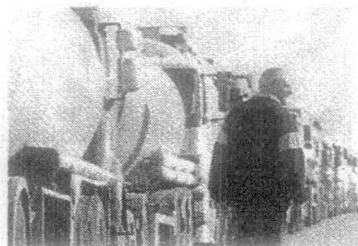
Members of the ruling majority pooh-poo such threats. "Oh, these demonstrations and threats are just the final thrashing of the tail, the death throes before the protests die out. I am not worried for Nicolas Sarkozy. He is a fine and courageous politician and he knows what he is doing. And what he is doing is both right and just. The French will end up accepting the changes because, in the final analysis,



PERPIGNAN: Striking workers block a train to protest against the pension reform, on October 19.



PARIS: Socialist leaders take part in a demonstration against pension reform on October 19.



DONGES: Outside a fuel depot on October 22. The police had to clear access to the main refinery as protests continued.

DELHI

THE HINDU • WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2010



UP IN ARMS: Private and public sector workers demonstrate over pension reforms in Marseille on Tuesday. — PHOTO: REUTERS

France in ferment over reforms

Vaiju Naravane

PARIS: There was real ferment in the streets of French cities on Tuesday as a general strike coupled with massive demonstrations across the country brought life to a near standstill. An estimated one million people had joined demonstrations by 4 pm, protesting against the government's plans to raise the retirement age from 60 to 62 and eventually 67 years.

"If this influx of people joining the demos continues, we will have met our objective of getting 2 million people to protest," Socialist MP Claude Bartolone told *The Hindu*. In fact, they achieved the objective as 2.5 million joined the protests.

"We may have an exceptional day and, if it is exceptional, we will perhaps be at a turning point," CGT leader

Bernard Thibault told reporters.

The crowds in Paris were so thick that the demonstration had to be cut into two, one cortege leaving from the Republic end while the other set off from the Bastille end. Protesters carried placards denouncing President Sarkozy's austerity measures and accusing the government of hypocrisy and corruption.

Unions have also called for the dismissal of the Labour Minister Eric Woerth who is embroiled in a scandal of conflict of interest — he is accused of protecting the interests of the super rich while accepting generous donations from them for the ruling conservative UMP Party of which he was, until recently, the treasurer.

Discussion suspended

The bill on raising the re-

tirement is one of the key reforms the President hopes to push through during the last two years of his mandate. Discussion of the bill in the Lower House was suspended on Tuesday following a noisy session interrupted by two communist deputies who presented a petition against the legislation bearing over 100,000 signatures.

Commuters and other travellers were severely affected as less than half the buses, metros and trains ran services.

Flights, hospital services were affected while post offices, and schools and universities remained shut. France's largest union, the CGT, said it expected the turnout for the protest marches across the country to be stronger than during the strikes in June, when more than 800,000 people took part in

demonstrations.

Unemployment figures in France remain high with 9.6 per cent of the active population unable to find jobs.

The government has argued that in the face of an ageing population and a shrinking job market, workers will have to work much longer to keep the country's generous pension and health care schemes afloat. Both the pension and social security funds are deeply in the red. France is one of the few EU countries where retirement at the age of 60 or even earlier is possible with a full pension. But the opposition socialists and the unions say the reforms proposed are unfair and penalise workers who entered the job market at a very young age since they do not take into account the number of years spent on the work-

DELHI

THE HINDU • THURSDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2010

France: show of force over reform

Vaiju Naravane

On October 19 the French were out in the streets again, protesting government plans to raise the retirement age, undaunted by warnings of dire consequences if the present social unrest continued.

And Nicolas Sarkozy, the most unpopular president in France's post war history, remained unmoved, repeatedly saying that he will not negotiate. The question now is: who will blink first.

On that Tuesday, three million people braved foul weather with cold pelting rain and a massive police presence to demonstrate en masse for the sixth time in less than a month. Public opinion is now firmly backing the strikers with 67 per cent of the French saying they want the proposed law to be substantially changed.

Urban guerrilla-style battles between police and angry unemployed youth were reported from Lyon and other cities as were clashes between police and striking students. Fuel shortages have resulted in long queues at petrol pumps as striking workers continue to block oil depots. Oil tankers sent in after special riot police broke up the pickets found their tyres slashed.

Orly and Roissy Charles de Gaulle, the two airports serving the French capital have seen severe disruption of traffic. Train lines are running intermittently.

The stand-off between striking workers and students and the government has taken a far more alarming turn. And day after day people are coming out in droves to protest against a reform they feel is fundamentally unjust as it penalises women and some of the poorer sections of the population, especially unskilled and semi-skilled manual workers.

At the heart of the protests lie President Sarkozy's plans to reform the nation's state-run pension scheme by raising the retirement age from 60 to 62 in the short run and to 67 by 2018, when the deficit-ridden system is ex-



RISING STAKES: *The protests are gaining momentum.*

- PHOTO: AFP

bering the young. At the same time technological advance has meant that in many industries men have been replaced by machines leading to persistently high rates of unemployment, placing an additional burden on state-funded unemployment benefit schemes.

The situation in France has deteriorated enough to resemble that of 1995 when a three-week-long total strike brought the economy to its knees and forced President Chirac and his government to abandon plans to introduce similar reforms to the pensions and retirement system.

President Nicolas Sarkozy by his stubborn refusal to negotiate with the opposition appears to have painted himself into a corner. He has repeatedly said he will not give an inch. With a Senate dominated by the ruling right wing coalition, the reform bill in its present form is likely to be adopted by the Upper House on October 21. But the bill must then go to a parliamentary commission and return to both houses for a vote on the amendments put forward during

ANNEXURE 5

Lorry drivers block the entrance of a regional transportation centre in Lesquin, Northern France, 19 October 2010 [Source: Guardian]



Annexure 6

A demonstration against reform in Paris, 28, October 2010 [Source: Guardian]

