No particular fashion event heralded the arrival of the Popular Front in 1936. The men who trooped to the polls that spring had long since abandoned the *coupe bressant* and the *coupe à l’américaine*. The stylish gent of the mid-1930s wore longer, curled hair, sometimes tapered or dyed, with a patina of gomina gel, in the manner of Caesar Romero.1 French women, who could not vote, did not cut their hair shorter to mark their support for social justice, as Long thought they had done in 1918, or drape their coiffures in expensive baubles to signal their defiance of policies that elevated the “vile multitude.” The accession of the Blum government produced neither *sans-culottes* nor *merveilleuses*, demonstrating once more that fashion was free to acknowledge, or not, history’s vicissitudes.

The Popular Front nonetheless produced a substantial ripple in the life of the hairdressing profession. Most obviously, it brought hard-pressed *ouvriers coiffeurs* higher wages, paid vacations, a five-day, forty-hour workweek. Actually, it is more accurate to say that the Popular Front promised *garçons coiffeurs* all these things; what it delivered was something less.

In fact, this gap between promise and fulfillment points to an important truth about the Popular Front. The progressive coalition of radicals, socialists, and communists came to power with the intention of shifting wealth from those who had more than they needed to those who had less. Yet they seem to have had no conception of how to make this policy work, especially in those parts of the economy where wage-payers and wage-earners lived broadly similar working lives. How could the new order ameliorate the lives of *ouvriers coiffeurs* without ruining *petits patrons*? This was the hurdle that Blum’s admirable drive for social equity would have to surmount.
The complexity of this task was obscured, at least for *ouvriers coiffeurs*, behind the optimism generated by the recaptured unity of the labor movement. In 1934, the French Communist Party, following the Kremlin’s new Popular Front strategy, pushed the CGT-Unitaire toward reconciliation with its old antagonist, the CGT. In coiffure, the FNSOC changed tack and began to talk to the *confédérés* about putting their old disputes behind them and presenting a united front against fascism and associated threats to the working class. The two federations arranged a unity meeting for November 1934, where 500 *ouvriers coiffeurs* heard an amicable exchange of views on subjects ranging from the forty-hour week, to the *salaire minimum*, to the recruitment of foreigners and *coiffeuses* in the syndical campaign. They consummated their reunion at the great “fusion congress” of January 1936, which celebrated the union of the two rival organizations and the amalgam of their respective *écoles de coiffure* under the leadership of François Magnien.

The significance of the event is attested by the participation of leading *patrons coiffeurs*. Even Robert Maigre arrived bearing congratulations from the SCP. Rambaud, always a man above politics, took the podium and saluted “the unity of the working class, especially among coiffeurs.” Magnien, perhaps missing the ecumenical spirit of the evening, finished his speech with a tribute to “the country without classes, where the worker is truly master of his destiny: the U.S.S.R.” And the meeting concluded with the singing of the *Internationale*. The next day the CSO named a new fusion *bureau*, headed by the old *unitaire* chief, Pierre Guny, and including Magnien as “delegate to the International.” The much larger group of *unitaires* received a majority of seats, but the *confédérés* seemed satisfied.

Reunification produced a bounce in recruitment even before the election of the Blum government. The FNSOC grew from about 3,000 *cotisants* in January 1936 to 8,000 by the Toulouse Unity Congress in March and 10,000 by June. By the end of February 1937, the coiffeurs’ federation had roughly doubled again in size. In other words, when the moment came to defend their Popular Front victory, *ouvriers coiffeurs* could flex unprecedented muscle.

That moment arrived following the election of the Popular Front coalition in May 1936. A “wave of strikes” washed over coiffure, closing some of the finest shops in Paris. Finally, thought Guny, the patrons would have to listen: “An impetuous wave [of action] is sweeping away all resistance,” he wrote, “and the proudest employers’ syndicats, who before refused even to talk to their workers’ delegates,