In the summer of 1944, the economic miracle that carried coiffure to new heights of creativity and prosperity lay in an unimaginable future. Meanwhile, as the Germans left Paris, hairdressers hurried to take their place on the barricades, and the settling of accounts began. The purges mostly ignored those coiffeurs who had become involved in public affairs during the occupation. The expropriation of coiffeurs juifs was quickly forgotten, and no one was indicted for the mere act of serving on the CO-Coiffure or the Famille professionnelle de l’hygiène. Rambaud, still mourning his wife’s recent death after her long battle with cancer, left for the mountains of the Haute-Savoie to write his history of hairstyles. Bagnaud and Magnien stayed in the capital to face their own postwar travails. Other leaders of the CPO and the CO-Coiffure returned to their federations and their salons. Louis Tison, the most Pétainist of coiffeurs, disappeared from the public life of the profession. Eugène Schueller, founder and director of L’Oréal, had a more serious brush with the purge authorities. He was saved, in the end, by a well-timed conversion to resistance causes and the intervention of friends in high places.¹

If the épuration hardly touched them, the coiffeurs could not escape the war’s other heavy legacy: penury. Amidst widespread but misplaced expectations that the departure of the Wehrmacht would bring a quick return to “normalcy,” hairdressers continued to lack the essentials of their trade.² Linen, shaving powder, even soap remained difficult to find. Authorities continued to restrict the hours that coiffeurs could light their salons and prohibited the use of electric signs and decorations. Regular power cuts lasted into 1950.³

The material hardship of life in liberated France naturally encouraged the resurgence of the labor movement, which generally went forward
in a spirit of warmth and comradeship. In coiffure, however, old enmities quickly resurfaced. The strong position that the communists had carved out for themselves in the CGT during the war promised grief for those who had worked too closely with the regime. Magnien was their chief target. He had ruled the FNSOC unopposed during the war, but the Liberation guaranteed a reckoning.

Magnien initially planned to adapt the Parisian syndicat unique to the Liberation merely by reintegrating those who had been forced out at the beginning of the war. This would give the communists a presence proportional to their strength among Parisian ouvriers coiffeur, and Magnien no doubt hoped that this would mollify the CGT while allowing him to retain control of the former CSO, now the SOC. Instead, Magnien and his allies quickly found themselves under fire from their “comarades communistes,” who accused these “sabateurs de la démocratie” of having stolen their syndicat in 1939. The CGT made no secret of its intention to “reconstitute a federation of coiffeurs purged of collaborationist and Vichyist elements.”

For the moment, the ouvrier coiffeurs communistes were led by Marcel Moreau, who believed that Magnien had denounced him to the Germans in 1940, as part of a plot to take full control of the profession. Encouraged by his friends on the CGT executive, who had already assured him that Magnien would be expelled from the labor movement, Moreau proposed that the prewar CSO bureau be restored, and that SOC members be required to apply individually for readmittance. That would allow “Pétainist” elements to be kept out and guarantee the communists the upper hand. Through the late summer and early fall of 1944, Magnien and Moreau met several times and exchanged polite notes, but their efforts to find common ground came to nothing.

These negotiations were soon preempted by the process of épuration. Magnien was summoned to the Commission nationale de reconstitution des organisations syndicales (CNROS) on November 2, 1944 and charged with having written articles praising the Labor charter and the Maréchal, served as vice president of the famille professionnelle, organized the anticomunist purge of the CSO in 1939, and disobeyed CGT discipline. Six days later the commission excluded Magnien from the labor movement “for life”—a rather pro forma verdict, considering his well-known involvement with the famille professionnelle.

The CNROS’s action was confirmed a month later by the Commission départementale de reconstruction des organisations syndicales (CDROS), which also cast out others who had worked for the famille professionnelle and syndicat unique: Paul Petit, “le premier