following year. In 1892 as well Millerand boldly proclaimed the absolute priority
of the rights of labor, to be protected in a future Socialist French Republic that
was based on the collective ownership of the means of production.6

Four years later, his Saint-Mandé program, which reflected recent Socialist
success at the polls, made new concessions to electoral politics and contained a
list of practical demands which, he hoped, would unite all Socialists and attract
mass support.7 Jaurès agreed. "Universal suffrage," he said,

plays a revolutionary role in capitalist society . . . It is in effect "legalized revolution" ... 
It is the absolute contradiction of capitalist hierarchy; the worker, who has no power in
the factory, is allowed to the same degree as the greatest employer to determine the
affairs of the nation . . . It is for capitalist society an agent of destruction.8

The victories of 1892 and 1893 seemed the first step in this "electoral
revolution".

The election of industrial Progressistes was a serious reversal of Socialist and
Radical expectations. In the mythologized political world in which so many
Frenchmen dwelt, it was assumed that industrial constituencies, once captured by
the Socialists, would remain theirs forever. This naive belief had been shared, not
only by their erstwhile Radical allies, but by conservative opponents as well.
Now they had been proven wrong: workers apparently did not invariably view
their employers as enemies, and most did not want to destroy capitalism.
Radicals had also been wrong, as the growth of large-scale industry and
commerce did not always threaten small business. Motte had claimed the
opposite, and many petty bourgeois voters in Roubaix had believed him. The
election of Motte, Claudinon, and, later, Arbel had thus come as a surprise to
many. It is no wonder that Eugène Motte’s defeat of Guesde, France’s best-
known Marxist, excited so much comment.

The surprise with which the election of liberal manufacturers in industrial
centers was viewed in France suggests the dangerous degree to which political
life had ceased to reflect economic realities. The Socialists had hoped to lead
voters away from capitalism. The Radical party, which, after 1898, had become
very influential in parliament, had tried to limit the growth of big business for
the benefit of small property owners. Nonetheless, French capitalism, having
recovered from the crises of the 1880s, had never been so strong. By the mid-
1890s, at a time when it seemed that manufacturers were being definitively
driven from power in France’s industrial towns, the economy entered a lively
new period of growth. Major firms that had survived the economic changes of
the previous decade were buoyed by the general European prosperity, which
continued until 1914. The elections of Motte and Claudinon in 1898, Arbel in
1910, and Wendel in 1914 had a salutary effect in bringing powerful industrial
leaders back into parliament and so helped narrow the growing divide between
economic and political power. The election of Progressistes, with the help of
working-class and petty bourgeois voters, far from weakening the Republic,
rather strengthened it by encouraging democratic politics.

Paternalism played an important role in industry. Although it was not just a
competition for a relatively small pool of labor, wages and benefits increased,
with industrialists often engaged in the race for the best work force. Some
industries, such as textiles, had long led the way in providing benefits for
their workers. But other industries, such as steel, lagged behind. In the late
19th century, there were only 38 mills in the Loire industry that had
benefits for their workers. The French government, through the Comité des
industries and the Comité des forges, was active in providing ways for
industries to improve working conditions. The government also provided
subsidies to industries to encourage the use of local materials and to
maintain high wages. These efforts were successful in improving the lives of
many workers, but the benefits were not evenly distributed. The largest
industries, such as steel, were able to maintain high wages and benefits, but
many smaller industries were not able to do so.

Labor-management relations were often contentious. As Michael Hanagan
notes, labor relations at De Wendel and other steel companies were often
tense, with workers demanding better wages and benefits. Sometimes, these
strikes and conflicts led to the radicalization of workers, as in the case of
the 1914 strike at De Wendel, which was eventually settled with the
connection of workers and the government. The government, through the
Comité des forges, was able to mediate these conflicts and to provide
benefits for workers. But these efforts were not always successful, and
worker unrest continued throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.