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French trade unions and the European integration process (1950–1973)

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The question of whether there was a relationship between the trade unions and European integration hardly needs to be asked, so closely interlinked were the two as a result of the Schuman Plan. This Plan addressed issues relating to the organisation of a sector of production, to social policy, and finally to peace. For the trade unions, discussions over which platform was the best for defending workers' interests were inevitable. At which level should the fight to secure better working conditions take place? At business or occupational sector level? At national, European, or even global level? This has been a long-running debate; as early as the interwar period, Albert Thomas was already considering the creation of a united Europe. He envisaged this within the context of a modern social policy. There was no contradiction between the different levels of intervention; in fact, more often than not, they complemented each other.

Trade unionism is also something which involves society as a whole; this explains the different ideological approaches to trade union action. These differences can lead to a lack of unity within trade unions and can pose problems of organisation at European level.

French trade unions were not opposed to the European integration process. It was the type of Europe being created that they found problematic. Differing opinions on this topic have not been lacking ever since the announcement of the Schuman Plan in 1950.

This article will be based on two main points. First, I shall present the positions of the French trade unions in relation to the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and to the European integration process from 1950 to 1957. With the signing of the Treaty of Rome came a new era. During this era, trade unions were forced to refine their idea of a united Europe, given that the integration process seemed irreversible. But they also had to review their strategies and their organisation. Was a European trade union organisation needed? The creation of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which coincided with the first enlargement, will bring this second part to a close.

I. From the ECSC to the Rome Treaties

European integration cannot be separated from the international context of the Cold War and East-West rivalries. The Schuman proposal did not merely concern the organisation of coal and steel production under a joint authority, it also met political objectives: European integration and the reconciliation of France and Germany. The trade unions had been involved in this political debate since the end of the Second World War with, for example, the presence of trade unionists (such as Maurice Bouladoux) at the Hague Congress of 1948 and, above all, their participation in the negotiations on the Paris Treaty and the establishment of the first European Community. In terms of the integration process which got under way after 18 April 1951, there were two camps:

— the cautious supporters of integration, Force Ouvrière (FO) and the French Christian Workers' Confederation (CFTC);

— the committed opponents to the process begun by the Treaty, the General Confederation of Labour (CGT).

1. FO, CFTC, ECSC and European integration

Avoiding direct attacks on the Treaty, FO and the CFTC attempted, instead, to improve the way it functioned. In order to do so, the two organisations went through their respective international counterparts: the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU). Before analysing these two organisations' proposals and courses of action, it is necessary, in my opinion, to make two preliminary remarks. First, the European debate barely rallied

activists from these trade unions because sectional and national demands were given precedence; hence it was limited to management bodies and specific federations or branches. Second, the debate was considered to be economic and social; institutional issues were rarely raised. Those who did envisage an institutional approach often represented organisations within the international confederations. Some would later become involved in the European institutions, for example Roger Reynaud from the CFTC, who became a member of the High Authority in 1958.

During the negotiation stage of the ECSC Treaty, FO and the CFTC made three proposals. They insisted on the need for one main economic and social advisory board, which they wanted to have the right to propose legislation in the Community's areas of responsibility. They wanted the trade unions to be granted the right to appoint several members of the High Authority (this task would fall to a liaison body for the representative international trade unions). The two organisations finally hoped to be able to propose candidates for the co-opted member. These proposals were, in reality, a result of the trade unions' fears: that of seeing the Community fall into the hands of technocrats; that of seeing it adhere exclusively to an economic line; that of the dismantling of certain social legislations (such as miners' rights); and that of seeing Europe transformed into a 'super cartel'. All of this explains their insistence on securing representation for workers within the Community executive. The two organisations were to be disappointed with the institutions which were eventually established.

From then on, the criticism levelled at the new institutions was accompanied by proposals that were based on two focal points. The first point concerned the need to modify the powers and responsibilities of the Consultative Committee and to improve representation for workers within this Committee. The organisations hoped that, in this way, the Committee would have the right to propose legislation and could deliver an opinion on all issues. They also challenged its composition, believing that the tripartite division (employers; trade unions; dealers and consumers) should be replaced by a bipartite division (employers; trade unions). The second point concerned the creation of institutional links between the Committee and the ECSC Parliamentary Assembly, which would be able to refer a matter to the Committee and carry out regular consultations with it. This would strengthen the Assembly in comparison with the High Authority and the Council of Ministers. The Committee and the Assembly were thus encouraged to support each other so that both bodies could increase their powers and responsibilities and would be able to assert themselves when faced with the power of the ECSC executive. The international confederations intervened on this point by making use of the Consultative Committee's rules of procedure. They succeeded in having the following article approved: 'If a unanimous group or one-third of the Consultative Committee members requests that the Consultative Committee be convened to debate a specific question, the Chairman shall submit the question to the High Authority, which will decide whether to agree to this request or not'. As a result, the Committee could take up all issues, and the trade unions could play a role in all areas. From 1955, the use of written questions from the Committee to the High Authority became standard practice. The High Authority would then respond by giving an oral report at the beginning of the following session. This practice was aimed at making the High Authority a body that was accountable to the Consultative Committee. In addition, let us not forget that Jean Monnet constantly asked for the opinion of the trade unions during his period as President of the High Authority.

Conflicts with the High Authority did arise from time to time. On 9 November 1955, at the behest of the trade unions, the Consultative Committee voted a motion calling for its Subcommittee on Labour Problems to be given the task of studying social issues and submitting the conclusions to the High Authority in the form of a resolution. The High Authority refused to accept this motion, taking the view that the Committee was not a social parliament. Force Ouvrière called for the resignation of the members of the workers' group. The threat of a withdrawal of the trade unions led the High Authority, without modifying the institutions, to submit all the important social issues to the Committee. It is possible to see, therefore, that in the initial stage of European integration, FO and the CFTC, through their international counterparts, attempted to strengthen the technical bodies in which there was trade union representation, and to transform the Consultative Committee into a social parliament, capable of having an effect on the ECSC's decisions and evolution. They also attempted to introduce a counterweight to the power of the executive, notably by making use of the Parliamentary Assembly, in which the trade unions had intermediaries, for example Socialist parties or Christian Democrat groupings. Finally, they wanted to make the High Authority accountable to the

Assembly and the social partners; in other words, to separate it from the States. The States were under no illusions on this point, refusing to let the trade unions take part in the negotiations on the Rome Treaties.

2. The CGT and European integration during the 1950s

According to the CGT, the Schuman Plan was, fundamentally, a ‘German’ plan in so far as it pleased the Germans, who had always dreamed of European hegemony. For them, the ECSC was a Ruhr–Lorraine consortium which benefited the magnates in the Ruhr: German steel producers who had always supported war. The Schuman Plan was in line with this and it was supported by the United States as a part of the Atlantic Pact and as a successor to the Marshall Plan. West Germany was to be used as a ‘parade ground, as a reserve of cannon fodder for the aggressive war against the USSR, the people’s democracies and, therefore, the labour movement’. The economic considerations highlighted by Schuman simply hid, therefore, the preparations for the final attack against the USSR. Moreover, the cartelisation that was envisaged by the ECSC would undeniably have a negative impact on France. It would lead to the laying-off of workers, because the potential of the Ruhr was greater than the potential of Lorraine and the Nord *département* put together. As an agent for unemployment, the Schuman Plan would inevitably lead to higher levels of labour migration. It would also be an agent for social regression, by calling into question the rights of miners and the joint conventions of the steel industry and by abolishing works councils.

A more beneficial national solution did exist, according to the CGT. Its economic programme of October 1950 for peace, national independence and social progress, put forward in response to the Schuman Plan, proposed controlling external trade through the imposition of quotas for coal and steel. It also provided for increased trade with the USSR and the people’s democracies. It demanded that France receive what it was due in terms of reparations. Finally, it proposed developing the practice of coking Lorraine coal. It was, therefore, necessary to fight the Schuman Plan, which prevented national development and was a threat to European peace. This fight became even more vital when the Pleven Plan of October 1950 confirmed to the CGT that its theories were correct, as this Plan contained the basis for German rearmament. This approach also enabled united action, given that rearmament was also denounced by other confederations. The battle plan diversified. Petitioning was followed by the establishment of departmental committees and the holding of a national conference opposing the Schuman Plan. In the French general elections of 1951, the CGT and the French Communist Party (PCF) attempted to engage Schuman in battle in his Moselle stronghold. The confederation also permanently succeeded in modifying its official line. With the Korean War and the revival of steel production (with an increase in employment), unemployment became less of a talking point and working conditions, which, according to members of the CGT, were getting worse, became a more important issue. In the coal-producing regions, which had always been affected by unemployment, the CGT continued to condemn the redundancies that were foreseen as a result of the Schuman Plan. As a consequence of its opposition to the ECSC, the CGT was absent from the representative bodies of the new Community, notably the Consultative Committee. The hoped-for united action barely materialised. With a process of European integration provided for in the long term by the Treaty of Rome, the main issue from that point onwards was CGT–EEC relations. Defending the interests of employees meant that the new Community could no longer be ignored.

II. French trade unionism and European integration from the Rome Treaties to 1973

Before looking at the positions of the French trade unions during this period, it would perhaps be useful to make a few preliminary remarks:

— European integration, after the Rome Treaties, was a fact, and this had to be accepted. An article in the 24 July 1965 edition of the French Democratic Confederation of Labour’s (CFDT) magazine *Syndicalisme Hebdo* read: ‘the EEC and the organised Community are a reality. Europe might have been a myth, an unfounded belief for some. Now, it is a fact. We cannot go back’;

— one trade union went through a radical change during this period: the CFTC became the CFDT in November 1964, before the minority groups which had not wanted to be part of this change reconstituted the CFTC. The positions adopted by the CFDT were often pioneering compared with the opinions that had been

voiced previously. The resolutely pro-European union aimed to create a political and social plan for Europe;

- growth and the problems associated with it led to a revival of social movements, in 1963, 1965 and even 1968;
- the emergence of the CFDT (which was the result of a process of secularisation of Christian trade unionism) raised the question of a reorganisation of the trade union movement and, in particular, the establishment of a European structure.

The three reformist organisations (FO, CFTC and CFDT) shared the same position on some issues. They all expressed their disappointment about the European institutions established by the Treaty of Rome. Although they were pleased with the creation of an Economic and Social Committee and of a European Social Fund in which the trade unions were represented, they did not consider that any progress had been made vis-à-vis the ECSC. They feared that the EEC would only be an economic structure, an economic power allowed to operate unchecked. The three confederations criticised the fact that the Economic and Social Committee had no right to propose legislation. Moreover, the States were the appointing authority, since they alone could draw up the list of candidates for a post within the Committee. Where did the representative trade union organisations fit in? The Committee's rules of procedure were also the responsibility of the Council of Ministers. It was, therefore, apparent that the real power belonged to the Council of Ministers; there was no counterweight to this power. This meant that the Assembly and the Commission were not the true centres of decision-making and of power.

What could be done? The CFTC wanted to secure the right for the Economic and Social Committee to propose legislation and increase its powers and responsibilities. The Christian confederation considered having the Committee made responsible for guaranteeing and defining the key rights of workers in the Community, in particular by introducing a minimum wage, a joint social security system and a European retirement scheme. Force Ouvrière, on the other hand, wanted the Committee to be able to deliver an opinion on all decisions taken by the Commission. Moreover, it wanted the Committee to be able to control the action taken on those opinions. The two trade union organisations did, however, agree that the Assembly and the Commission should have greater powers. It was essential, for example, that the Commission could intervene in the establishment of joint policies and that the Assembly could review the decisions taken by the Council of Ministers. Since the signing of the Treaty of Rome, a minority of the CFTC (affiliated to the 'Reconstruction' group) had identified the weaknesses in the new Community. It suffered from a 'lack of democracy', in so far as the workers were not adequately represented within the institutions. This faction of the CFTC was of the opinion that the trade unions should be represented at the level of both the Commission and the Board of Directors of the European Investment Bank (EIB).

These deficiencies at institutional level could not, however, result in the process of European integration itself being called into question. Europe was a synonym of peace (this statement was equally a response to the CGT, which led campaigns for peace and for which European integration was an 'attack' against the USSR). European integration had facilitated growth and, therefore, wage increases. It created an opportunity for joint policies, a framework within which trade unions could intervene in order to avoid free trade, or even a 'business Europe'. The beginning of this integration process also demonstrated the risks involved. A strengthening of the concentration and specialisation of businesses was evident and this led to the desertification of some regions, due to the absence of a European policy on regional planning. This restructuring led to an increase in unemployment. New joint policies were required. Europe also lacked confidence, especially when it came to the United States. It needed to pursue ambitious cooperation agreements with some world regions (in particular the former colonies).

Exactly what was the Europe that these trade unions wanted during the 1960s? Firstly, it was a Europe that established new joint policies. Given the decline in the coal-producing industry, it was vital to launch a joint energy policy with the aim of achieving European independence. What was most important, however, was the establishment of a European social policy. This was contingent upon, firstly, a harmonisation of the social protection of the Six, according to the twofold principle of a progressive reduction of differences and improvements to the services available in the countries with the most developed welfare systems. When it

came to management of social protection, differences in opinion appeared between the advocates of a joint approach and those who preferred a more State-based approach. This was then followed by the establishment of a European Labour Conference (bringing together the Commission, Ministers for Social Affairs from the Six, and workers' and employers' organisations). This aimed to establish the broad lines of a Community policy for this sector. Of particular importance was ensuring that the free movement of workers would not be the consequence of economic pressures. A joint employment policy also implied a joint policy on vocational training. This was contingent upon an improvement in the mechanisms of the European Social Fund, which had the power to intercede at EIB level, so that the Bank might authorise financing for full-employment policies. However, the establishment of such policies naturally required a Europe-wide definition of the unemployed, vocational retraining and continuing and permanent training. In the light of such proposals, it was clear that the reformist trade unions had come round to the idea of a Europe of organised markets. What they wanted was to secure a measure of control for workers' organisations in the definition of economic policies.

However, Europe also had to play an international role. It should, according to the trade unions, be able to assume a role on the global stage dominated by the United States, in particular by pursuing a policy of technological independence. It was up to the Six to set a dialogue in motion with Eastern Europe, in the form of economic and cultural cooperation, because only a policy of that type could encourage the USSR and the peoples' democracies to evolve. Lastly, the EEC had a responsibility towards the Third World. Only Europe could help it escape from under-development. In that regard, the CFDT was disappointed, for example, that the Yaoundé Convention did not provide for joint employer–trade union representation. In addition to all of this, the CFDT provided an extra dimension. For the confederation established in 1964, enlargement to include the countries of northern Europe was essential because it would strengthen social Europe. In terms of joint policy, it would also have been useful to give some thought to a European, as well as a regional, planning policy. In 1969, André Jeanson of the CFDT went to Luxembourg to call for an EEC planning body to be established. As for the institutions, Eugène Descamps' union demanded that Parliament be granted true control over the budget and Community policies. It also called for the widespread implementation of qualified majority voting within the Council of Ministers. This democratisation of Europe that the CFDT hoped for, together with the aspects listed above, demonstrates that, from the 1960s, this confederation was determined to make Europe an area where capitalism would be regulated.

As for the CGT, although it continued its criticism of the European integration process, its sheer size meant that Georges Séguy's union could not remain outside the process. It attempted, therefore, to secure representation on the Economic and Social Committee, but it clashed with FO. Those in power well know how to play on such trade union rivalries as between the CGT and FO, and between the CFTC and the CFDT.

However, it was equally clear that if trade unionism wanted to play an important role in European integration, it also had to acquire structures at European level. This inevitably raised some issues: if this level was set up, should the autonomy of the national confederations be limited? Should they be made into national sections of a European trade unionism? Should the national confederations continue to define national positions when the decision-making centres — largely capitalist — were international? What could be done to oppose this capitalism? It became clear that discussions between trade unions and joint actions against businesses were limited. Some unions had to make the move towards being a European organisation. For the CFDT, which was in the thick of this conflict, this meant surpassing the Christian constitution of the IFCTU. When it came to putting this into practice, there was conflict between those who wanted to use the secretariats of the international federations and those who wanted to work towards greater synergy at trade union level between France and Germany. A series of changes led to the emergence of a European organisation. In 1968, the transformation of the IFCTU into the World Confederation of Labour (WCL), a secular organisation, allowed closer relations to be established with the ICFTU. Changes were taking place within the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), which was Communist, in so far as the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL) had distanced itself from it. These changes encouraged the creation of a European confederation, and in 1973 the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) was established.

Would this new structure be able to move beyond the discord reigning between the former European organisations of international trade unions? Could it nurture a coherent European plan and decide on new formulas and structures, such as cross-border organisations? The Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE) began in the 1950s, hence trade union Europe was created long after employer Europe, long after the implementation of the customs union. One factor played in its favour: the enlargement of 1973 brought powerful northern European trade unions into the Community. Would that be enough to create a favourable balance of power?

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