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Christian Trade Unionism in France: A Left Socialist Experience
Le syndicalisme chrétien en France : une expérience de socialisme de gauche

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Article abstract

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Christian Trade Unionism in France

A Left Socialist Experience

Everett M. Kassalow

The author presents a synthesis of the evolution of the Confédération française démocratique du travail. The French Democratic Confederation of Labor.

The West European Christian trade union movements have many characteristics in common; but in the course of recent decades these movements have tended to diverge from their fairly common origins and taken on more national characteristics.

The French Democratic Confederation of Labor, Confédération française démocratique du travail-CFDT, lineal descendant of the French Christian Confederation of Labor-CFTC, has pursued the most interesting of these diverging paths. It stands today as the only large European labor movement which has clearly proclaimed its adherence to a new-left type revolutionary socialist philosophy and program. There are some new-left type socialist groups elsewhere in European labor movements (in both the Belgian socialist and Christian union movements, in one or two Italian union and political movements, and in a few union and socialist party movements in other countries), but these are minority factions and often small minorities, in contrast to their majority position in CFDT. Most recently, the CFDT has been under pressure from a group of even further left forces, Maoists, Trotskyists and others in its own ranks.

Briefly the evolution of the CFDT looks as follows.[1] Born in 1919 officially as a new federation (there were earlier *individual* French Christian unions dating from the turn of the twentieth century), the French Christian Labor Confederation-CFTC, labored under the typical handicaps of Christian trade unionism in Western Europe in the first

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[1] For more detailed treatment of the early phases of this evolution see: Gerard ADAM, «La C.F.T.C., 1940-1958» (Paris: Armand Colin, 1964); on the deconfessionalization of the CFTC see Gerard C. THORMANN, «The Ideological Evolution of Christian Trade Unionism since World War II,» *Catholic Historical Review,* 56, No. 1 (April 1970).

decades of the 20th century. Most of these unions were looked upon as inspired by a combination of the Catholic Church and employers to weaken if not replace the dominant socialist led unions of Europe. Like its sister organizations in other countries, the CFTC was largely based among white collar (including government) employees, and it took its doctrine from church social teachings. Some tutelage from church functionaries was quite common and accepted in the first decade or two of its existence, although this way was somewhat less true in France than in other countries.

The period of the first Popular Front in France, the middle thirties, when Communist, socialist and anarcho-syndical fractions reunited into the traditional CGT-Confédération Générale du Travail, was a severe testing time for the CFTC. However, it resisted the pressure for unity, and became quite independent of any employer influence. Direct church influence, too, was relegated more to the background. It continued in its adherence to an enlightened Catholic social philosophy, which accepted the general idea of class collaboration.

The top leadership of CFTC came through the war and resistance period with flying colors — more than could be said of a number of CGT leaders. The top CFTC leaders rejected the blandishments of the wartime Vichy government and joined CGT leaders in various underground joint union manifestos. By the war's end, the CFTC had clearly established its credentials as a legitimate though clearly minority union movement.

In 1945, its leaders were under some pressure (including pressure from some of the «activits» within its own ranks) to join the reunited CGT in affiliating with the new international union body, the World Federation of Trade Unions. The latter had been set up primarily by the efforts of the British Trade Union Congress, the CIO in the U.S.A., and the Trade Union Federation of the Soviet Union. It embraced almost all the union movements of Europe (and other parts of the world), a notable opponent was the AFL.

The CFTC's leaders' wisdom in resisting the WFTU was borne out when the organization underwent a split between non-Communist unions on the one side, and Communist controlled unions, including the French CGT on the other. The secession of the Force ouvrière-FO group from the by then Communist controlled CGT in France, further confirmed the sagacity of CFTC's resistance to organic unity at home as well as in the international union field. With French labor divided

between the CGT, FO and CFTC, in the late forties, unionism had taken on the broad contours it would hold for two ensuing decades.

But important internal changes were already underway within the CFTC itself. A so-called minorité movement dedicated to transforming CFTC into a more mass organization, with a wider socialist and class basis was already in operation.

The sources and character of this minorité are hard to summarize, but briefly they looked like this. The intellectual leader of the group was Paul Vignaux, a philosopher and union educator. Himself the top officer of the small CFTC secular teachers union, he became the principal teacher of a new, rising generation of young union leaders. Vignaux seems largely to have identified with traditional European labor-socialism, reformist socialist ideas; but he also had been considerably influenced by his wartime years passed in the United States. There was, thus, an important emphasis on hard, pragmatic unionism in his conceptions, and these conceptions as well as a general philosophy of socialism had considerable influence on the rising young minorité leaders of CFTC. These leaders, incidentally, were largely based in private sector unions such as metals, chemicals, and the building industry. As these industries expanded in the course of the French economic miracle of the fifties and sixties, so did the strength of the minorité. The economic possibilities presented by these industries also helped encourage hard pragmatic bargaining attitudes among many of these young activists.

It is somewhat more difficult to assess the impact of changes which were taking place within the Catholic Church. Suffice to say, the eventual triumph of the minorité in the CFTC and their transformation of the organization into the CFDT, could hardly have taken place if there were not broad, active left-social forces within the church itself, seeking to expand its relations with the wider community. These forces helped modify the traditional attitudes of many Catholic workers and other large parts of the church community.

Paradoxically, however, the minorité took as one of its key objectives the deconfessionalization of the CFTC and its conversion into a secular body, to broaden its appeal and to pave the way for acceptance of a socialist program.

For Vignaux and some of the other minorité leaders in the fifties and early sixties, such a transformation was hopefully to have formed a bridge to an even wider transformation of all the free (non-Communist) union forces into a centralized, socialist oriented union movement,

probably including the FO. This new organization would then be able to face the Communist controlled CGT from a position of equality.

Any merger with the FO was soon beyond possibility. FO leaders were suspicious of any new, non-religious, non-communist, socialist oriented labor federation other than their own. On the other hand a growing number of minorité leaders had come to regard the FO as a stagnant, conservative tending force. Some of them also seemed to sense that this new « Socialist » union movement would have to seek out ground (a platform) newer than the cautious reformist socialist terrain already occupied by FO.

FO also objected strenuously to first CFTC's and later CFDT's practice of accepting and even seeking unity of action with the communist controlled CGT. Even relatively conservative leaders of the CFTC in the years following World War II and in the 1950's had taken the position that CGT's great following among the French working class made cooperation necessary in specific labor situations (strikes, occasional wage drives, etc.). This practice has been expanded considerably by CFDT leaders and they now generally preach the necessity to negotiate a broad unity of action pact with the CGT, and to pursue a fairly wide range of joint programs, even though they frequently charge CGT seeks to act and lead on its own. CFDT leaders clearly have no interest in organic unity with CGT, although both organizations issue pious platitudes about the necessity for organic working class unity, from time to time.

In passing it might be noted that CFTC leaders felt reasonably safe from the danger that joint action with CGT might enable the latter, the larger and more orthodox union group, to draw off substantial numbers of the CFTC membership. CFTC leaders seem to have had confidence in the basically Catholic ties of its members. To some extent the same has been true of CFDT leaders, since their deconfessionalized organization's membership is still primarily Catholic by origin and/or some identification. FO on the other hand, aside from its principled objections to unity of action with CGT, faced the grave possibility that any large scale joint action might lead to a major movement of its members into the ranks of the much larger CGT.

To return to the main line of evolution, the minorité became a majority by the early sixties, it took over the top leadership of the organization, amended the constitution to eliminate references to the church or Christian doctrine, and changed its name to CFDT. A small fraction withdrew from the CFDT, and after a long court struggle,

won the right to the name of CFTC, and exists today with less than 100,000 members. (One scholarly estimate put CFDT membership in 1972 at 725,000, with CGT at 2,100,000. From this figure we might estimate CFDT membership as over 800,000 today.[2])

The rites of passage of the new organization were not exactly those envisaged by some of the original minorite leaders. As it developed its own program and philosophy the new CFDT leadership veered further to the left. For example, at its 1970 Congress, still reeling from the heady experiences of the May-June 1968 uprisings, the CFDT adopted a new program. It firmly embraced the concept of the class struggle, it offered a neu-Marxist critique of capitalism with much emphasis on the wasteful forms of private consumption under modern capitalism. It explicitly rejected the possibilities of reformism and embraced revolutionary socialism.[3]

While CFDT accepts the process of collective bargaining, it looks upon collective agreements not as instruments of mutual rights and obligations, but only a pause while the working class mobilizes itself, «a stage in the daily struggle which converges in the direction of an overthrow of capitalist society.»[4] Such a conception is rather in keeping with the earlier revolutionary-anarchistic resistances to written collective bargaining, which were over come at a relatively late date in France, compared to most other West European countries.

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[2] See François SELLIER, *Les Problèmes du Travail en France: 1920-1974.* Paper presented to the International Industrial Relations Association, 4th World Congress, Geneva, September 6-10, 1970, P. 20. The CFDT takes pride in the fact that it annually publishes extensive data on its membership, going beyond, it claims, anything the other union centers do. For example, a recent issue of its weekly journal ran an article entitled, «The CFDT has Open Books,» [«La CFDT A Livres Ouverts,»] *Syndicalisme,* Jan. 27, 1977. In this article CFDT claimed 820,490 members at the end of 1976, based on the «true number of [monthly] dues stamps» paid up by its various unions. Actually as many as 1,066,640 workers had affiliation cards with CFDT in 1975, according to the same article, but the lower figure is accounted for by the effects of seasonal work, layoffs, illnesses, military service etc. on the part of members. In all of these estimates, whether scholarly or by CFDT itself it is not clear even when dues stamps are talked about, if these are based on a full 12 month average «paid-up» membership, or some fewer number of months. In the U.S., Canada, and in most other developed countries, a 12 month basis is generally used in estimating union membership. A critique of CFDT's methods of reporting its membership and finances can be found in the monthly journal, *Les Études Sociales et Syndicales* [Paris], January, 1975. (Similar criticisms could be made of membership claims of the other major federations.)

[3] The CFDT program was set forth in the «Constat» adapted by its 1970 Congress. See *Syndicalisme,* May 14, 1970.

[4] *Syndicalisme,* December 24, 1969 for the statement of the CFDT Confederal Council.

While it does place emphasis upon democratic planning and socialization of the means of production, one of the somewhat unique aspects of CFDT's socialism is «autogestion», workers self management (or government) of enterprise. (The whole of CFDT's program shows the strong influence of the new-left socialism being proposed in different parts of Europe, with much emphasis upon greater workers' participation. André Gorz in France is one typical important source of influence.) Again and again the Confederation has repeated that mere nationalization of the means of production is not sufficient, and could by itself, as in the Soviet case, merely lead to a kind of étatist society. Workers' self management is critical for CFDT's socialism.

Indeed, the CFDT's reluctance to make any formal approval of the Communist-Socialist political unity program in 1972 stemmed in part from that program's failure to embrace «auto-gestion», a doctrine which is something of an anathema to the étatist oriented French Communist Party and its CGT, both of whom have been strong supporters of the left party unity program. In subsequent years the French Socialist Party under Mitterand has proved more friendly to autogestion. Some top key leaders of the CFDT are now openly identified with the Socialist Party, and a growing number of the union's «militants» (activists) also belong to the same party.[5] It seems quite likely those leaders will support the left coalition in the coming critical, national elections.[6]

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[5] Some 41% of the delegates to the 1976 CFDT Congress indicated, in a survey of their opinions that they belonged to a political party. More than half of these were affiliated to the Socialist Party. In the preceding Congress (1973) only half of the delegates were affiliated politically and affiliation to the Socialist Party was markedly less. *Syndicalisme,* Sept. 23, 1976. The Party of Socialist Unity (PSU), which stands to the left of the French SP was supported by a little less than half as many delegates as the SP. It is very likely that the ordinary rank and file member of the CFDT is less «left» tending in his politics than are the «militants». On the attitudes of French workers, including the political leanings of CFDT members, see Gerard Adam, et al., *L'Ouvrier Français in 1970* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970), p. 202.

[6] In the 1977 local government elections, CFDT while «giving support to the forces of the left,» seemed to tiptoe around any outright support of one group or any candidate. It emphasized that no candidate could use «the emblem of the CFDT.» *Syndicalisme,* March 10, 1977. CFDT urged its activists to question local candidates on issues ranging from urban management, the state of local labour exchanges [«bourses de travail»], the offica accomodations provided for unions, by local governments as well as candidates' views on workers' self management. See *Syndicalisme,* February 17 1977. As the first round of the local elections was completed CFDT took satisfaction in the results which rebuked the policy of the incumbent national government. CFDT, *Service de Presse,* March 14, 1977.

The CFDT has periodic, formal friendly consultative meetings with both the French Communist and Socialist Parties, but it always seems to have some final reservation about making a full organizational commitment of political support, let alone establishing formal connections with any party. In part one suspects this springs from a kind of French anarcho-syndical union reservation about tying in with political parties. The union movement itself is looked upon as an instrument of revolutionary transformation which can in no way be subordinated to political parties. At its recent, May 1976 *Congress,* the CFDT reiterated that it

> «refuses any conception which is based on the division of labor between the trade unions and political parties. The distinction between parties and unions is not one based on field of action — there is only one class struggle — but that of functions. The union is the means of expressing the identity of the working class, its function is to act and guide the actions on behalf of the defense of all the material and moral interests of the workers in the farce of all forces and to propose a program of social transformation. That is why a union could not ally itself to a program of government and could not conclude organic alliances with any party whatsoever.»[7]

The CFDT constantly strikes the theme of trade union independence to protect and promote workers' interests, even in the event of the triumph of socialism and «autogestion». A recent CFDT comment on Poland and new anti-union measures taken in that country included the remark that trade unions «must remind those who govern, even in the same of socialism, that the interests of workers do not always correspond with those that are called the needs of the State.»[8] It is not clear, however, just what the trade union function would be under socialism and autogestion. But the fact that this subject of union independence under all social forms of organization is under almost continuous discussion in CFDT circles is one clear indication of the way in which CFDT's brand of socialism is differentiated from Soviet or Chinese Marxism under which the state would be presumed to be acting on behalf of workers (and all groups') interests.

On foreign policy matters, although it cherishes its ties with some of the European socialist-labor complexes, CFDT makes even more of its identification with the third world countries and liberation movements. It makes extensive critiques of the U.S. government which it sees as the important center of world capitalism and exploitation. (At

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[7] *Syndicalisme,* June 3, 1976 (my own translation, EMK).

[8] *Syndicalisme,* December 23, 1976.

the 1976 CFDT Congress, the delegates voted to make the labor attaché of the U.S. Embassy in Paris leave the hall. He had been invited to attend the proceedings, along with attachés from other embassies by the CFDT leadership, in keeping with a long standing practice). It is also critical, from time to time, of the Soviet Union which it regards as a very flawed attempt at socialism. Like other European socialist forces, it bitterly criticized the Soviets' 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia.

To turn to the recent CFDT Congress, it revealed a number of growing new difficulties confronting the organization. As an open, left socialist union body, CFDT has admitted a variety of individuals including Maoists, Trotskyists, Anarchosyndicalists and others (who would not be comfortable in the CGT, and moreover would face the constant threat of expulsion in that more tightly Communist Party disciplined body.)

These far left factions combined with a handful of important unions pushed hard in the May 1976 Congress for a number of program amendments, which revealed a growing confrontation in CFDT ranks.[9] For example, one such amendment to the leadership's program called upon «the workers to exercise a hegemonic role» in leading the struggle to overthrow capitalism. Another amendment more explicitly called for leadership by the «avant-garde», and the «l'extrême-gauche» in CFDT's path to socialism. Both proposals, smacking of Leninist ideas, were defeated by the CFDT's leadership as being incompatible with true mass, democratic socialism as well as because they injected purely political conceptions into the union movement. But the first amendment was only defeated by a 57-42% vote, and the second gained 25% of the vote (against 67% for the majority position).[10]

On the symbolically important issue of international trade union ties, the CFDT leadership sought support for its program calling for

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[9] For the report on this Congress, including the debates on various amendments proposed by the extreme left forces, see *Syndicalisme*, June 3, 1976.

[10] Recently, the CFDT rather neatly described itself as favoring «neither reformism nor avant guardism,» but rather for the establishment of a selfmanaged socialism» [«l'instauration d'une société socialiste autogestionnaire»]. *Syndicalisme*, January 27, 1977. At about the same time André Bergeron, General Secretary of CFDT's principal non-communist rival FO, was proudly declaring «We are reformists, and we're not ashamed to admit it. Sometimes we tell those who reproach us for this that 'revolutionaries' talk about revolution while 'reformists' make it.» «Free Labour World Interviews André Bergeron,» *Free Labour World* [Journal of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions], March-April, 1977.

unity of the International Confederation of the Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the World Confederation of Labor (WCL, formerly the Christian trade union international body, IFCTU) along with other progress in union forces. CFDT has been a member of the WCL, and active in some autonomous parts (the international trade union secretariats) of the ICFTU, and has sought the role of bringing together the two, free world union bodies.[11]

Here again, the far left political minority joined by an important group of unions led by the textile-clothing federation supported an amendment which would have clearly embraced the Communist controlled World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in any new unified international union front. This amendment gained over 41% of the Congress's support against 48.8% for the majority leadership's position.

Finally, when it came to the election of the *Bureau National,* the minority left forces mobilized against the leader of the CFDT's metal federation (by far its largest affiliate with 20% of the Confederation's total membership), and almost defeated him, even though he is probably second only to the General Secretary in current CFDT leadership importance. Incidentally, the irony is that it was the same metal union which ten and twenty years earlier led the transformation of the CFTC to the CFDT. Moreover, in top European metal union circles the present leader of the French metal federation would be looked upon as one of the more left tending socialist types!

It is difficult to explain the speed in the evolution of left forces in the CFDT. It is almost as though the 1970 program with its great emphasis upon political doctrine opened the door to unlimited «politicalizing» of the organization. The very openness of the body seems to have made it easy prey for active, young far left political militants, and while they are not likely to take over the CFDT, it is difficult to see how real unity can be restored. The broadly political preoccupations of the leadership itself are revealed in their own discussions of the upcoming issues in the weeks preceeding the Congress.[12]

It also appears the the enormous political emphasis of recent years has weakened the basic trade union strength of the cadres of the

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[11] In a recent interview, Rene Salanne, who has been a principal CFDT representative to many international union meetings and to the International Labor Office meetings in Geneva, ruled out the immediate possibilities of any «fusion» between ICFTU and WCL. *Syndicalisme,* Nov. 4, 1976.

[12] See for example the debate on the «Crisis of Society and the Crisis of Capitalism», in *Syndicalisme,* May 5, 1976.

CFDT itself. Earlier in the fifties and even in the sixties one of the organization's sources of strength was an increasing number of experienced, dedicated young leaders, especially, in the private sector. These leaders, with their hard, rather pragmatic philosophy, became a considerable force at the bargaining table in many metal, chemical and other plants.

The CFDT seems recently to be much less of an effective force in these areas. In many situations the early tough, resolute bargainers have given way to less experienced, more politicalized leadership which has been increasingly troublesome of some managements, but it seems to have less to show in terms of important gains in collective bargaining.

That the struggles which surfaced at the CFDT Congress continue to be troublesome is attested to by the admission that the union's national council discussed these problems extensively at its October, 1976 meeting. While minimizing newspaper charges of an «internal crisis of the CFDT», General Secretary Edmond Maire indicated that just as an earlier struggle had to be carried for «deconfessionalisation» of the CFDT, «the CFDT today must struggle against Marxist clericalism». This was not to dismiss certain aspects of Marxist analysis which «are present in our conceptions»; but it was a campaign against the rise «of a certain form of infantilism» based on a «mythical Marxism coming from the writers after 1968», which was reinforced by the entry into the CFDT «of a small number of activists educated in Trotskyism or Maoism who are trying to impose their dogmatic union on all others, whom they regard as revisionists or social democrats». At the same time Maire warned that many CFDT «militants» were neglecting the importance of trade union work and organization at the task itself.[13]

In terms of numbers of supporters among French workers, however, CFDT appears to hold its own over the years. Table 1 shows the vote among leading French federations for members of plant committees

[13] *Syndicalisme*, Nov. 4, 1976. An earlier article in the same journal (October 28, 1976), carried an attack against «those irresponsible persons who pretend to speak in the name of the workers.» This article analyzed a tract being circulated by some extreme left forces in the CFDT which saw that union «as no better than others», but admitted they were using their within it to further their own political efforts. The same tract scorned such union representation rights as were won after the May 1968 strikes, and institutions protecting union delegates in the shop as a «payoff for collaboration» with the bourgeoise.

in the private sector from 1966 to 1974 (the latest year for which full reports are available, but recent fragmentary data would indicate CFDT is generally holding its own in plant elections.)

TABLE 1

Voting Preferences, by Union, French Plant Elections, 1966-1974*

Origin in Candidates	*1966*	*1968*	*1970*	*1972*	*1973*	*1974*
CGT	50.8%	47.9%	46.0%	44.1%	40.8%	42.7%
CFDT	19.1%	19.3%	19.6%	18.9%	19.6%	18.6%
FO	8.0%	7.5%	7.3%	7.6%	7.7%	8.3%
CFTC	2.4%	22.9%	2.7%	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%
CGC (Cadre Union)				5.6%	5.1%	5.3%
Other Unions	3.5%	5.4%	7.0%	7.1%	5.2%	6.2%
Non-union	12.6%	11.7%	11.7%	14.1%	10.0%	15.7%

* Sources: Ministry of Labour, Paris, France and *Liaisons Sociales* (Paris, France). Earlier years do not total to 100%, since certain groups are not included. It must also be emphasized that these figures do not include results from the so-called nationalized sector where FO has much greater strength.

The steadiness of CFDT voting strength may suggest there is a tendency for some observers, including the present one, perhaps to exaggerate the effects of some of the organization's internal political struggles. But the large votes against the leadership's proposals at the 1976 Congress in a number of areas, do indicate great organization tension.

How can this be evaluated as a Christian union experience? It should be recalled that a minority, more faithful to Christian social doctrine refused to go along with the deconfessionalization movement, split off and retained the name CFTC.

It might have been imagined that the Catholic Church itself would have favored the CFTC, but such was not the case, as the church seemed to adopt a surface position of neutrality. Even more, aside from any formal nonintervention, it is my impression that all sorts of Catholic journals and social groups seemed to show much greater interest in and sympathy with the CFDT (perhaps inevitably because it was much larger, perhaps, too, this reflected the strength of left forces within the church). More recently these have been one or two signs of some movement away from the CFDT and towards clearer neutrality by parts of the church.

The earlier generation of leaders of the minorite and then of the first years of the CFDT seemed to have had closer, personal church

backgrounds, though they militantly campaigned for deconfessionalization. Most of them, for example, were graduates of the Young Christian Worker movement (JOC). This seems to be less true of the newer, more recent leadership generation. (One of the remarkable features of CFTC and then CFDT, has been the rate at which it wears out its leaders. Among the leaders of the ten affiliated national unions elected to its *Bureau National,* in May 1976, only 4 were over 40, the oldest being 47, the youngest 33).

The bulk of the membership, from such evidence as is available, is still heavily Catholic worker in origin. In national political elections despite CFDT's left program, CFDT supporters seem to vote less left (Communist or Socialist) than do FO's followers, let alone CGT members.

While it is largely outside the scope of the present study it is instructive to compare the rather peaceful, post-war deconfessionalization of the Catholic union federation — NKV — in the Netherlands with that in France. In the Netherlands, there is now in process an organic merger between the great bulk of this Catholic federation and the socialist tending, the largest Dutch labor federation, NVV. The Catholic federation has, in the past decade, moved moderately to the left as a prelude to this unity, while the NVV will probably accept more neutrality as regards politics. The unity tends to be pragmatic, trade union «based».

As one compares this with the more «revolutionary» or «leftist» experience of the CFDT, he cannot but be impressed with the transcendingly *French* socio-political character of the CFDT phenomenon.

Le syndicalisme chrétien en France: une expérience socialiste de gauche

Les mouvements syndicalistes chrétiens d'Europe occidentale ont plusieurs caractéristiques en commun, mais au cours des dernières décennies, ils se sont éloignés les uns des autres et ont revêtu certaines caractéristiques nationales.

La Confédération française démocratique du Travail (CFDT), qui descend en ligne directe de la Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens (CFTC), a suivi un cheminement fort intéressant. Elle est aujourd'hui le seul grand mouvement ouvrier qui a proclamé ouvertement son adhésion à un programme et à une philosophie socialistes révolutionnaires de gauche. On retrouve quelques groupes socialistes de gauche ailleurs, mais il s'agit de factions minoritaires, souvent très petites. Tout récemment, la CFDT a subi la pression de groupes d'extrême-gauche: maoïstes, trotskistes et autres.

L'Auteur retrace ensuite l'évolution de ce mouvement syndical, fondé en 1919, sous le nom de CFTC, qui s'est développé de la même façon que les centrales syndicales des autres pays durant les premières décennies du XXe siècle. La plupart de ces syndicats étaient considérés comme des organismes établis par l'Église catholique et les employeurs pour affaiblir, sinon pour remplacer, les syndicats d'obédience socialiste. La CFTC était surtout formée de cols blancs et elle inspirait son action des enseignements sociaux de l'Église. Elle a grandi sous la tutelle du clergé au départ, quoique ce phénomène ait été moins marqué en France qu'ailleurs.

La période du premier Front populaire en France, au milieu des années '30, lorsque communistes, socialistes et anarcho-syndicalistes se regroupèrent dans la Confédération générale du travail (CGT), fut une dure éprouve pour la CFTC. Toutefois, elle résista aux pressions qui étaient faites pour l'absorber et elle se libéra en même temps de l'influence des employeurs. Elle continua à adhérer à la philosophie sociale catholique qui acceptait le principe général de la collaboration des classes.

Au cours de la guerre, les chefs du mouvement ont rejeté la collaboration du gouvernement du Vichy et ils se sont joints à la Résistance. Ainsi, à la fin de la guerre, la CFTC était reconnue comme mouvement syndical véritable bien que minoritaire.

En 1945, la CFTC résista à la tentative qui était faite pour l'amener à se joindre à la CGT et à la Fédération syndicale mondiale qui englobait presque toutes les centrales syndicales de l'Europe et d'autres parties du monde. La prudence des dirigeants de la CFTC se confirma lorsque survint quelques années plus tard la rupture entre les syndicats communistes et les autres groupements syndicaux. En France, le mouvement syndical se trouvait sectionné en trois branches; CGT, FO et CFTC.

Toutefois, des changements importants étaient déjà en cours à l'intérieur même de la CFTC. Un groupe minoritaire cherchait à la transformer en un mouvement de masse socialisant et fondé sur la lutte des classes. Le chef intellectuel de ce groupe était Paul Vignaux, philosophe et éducateur syndical. Dirigeant d'un petit groupement d'enseignants laïques, il devint l'éducateur d'une nouvelle génération de chefs syndicaux. Vignaux s'identifiait aux idées réformistes et socialistes, mais il fut aussi beaucoup influencé par son séjour aux États-Unis pendant la guerre. Les dirigeants, qu'il fut appelé à former, se recrutaient surtout dans le secteur privé: métallurgie, industrie chimique et industrie du bâtiment. Comme ces industries prirent beaucoup d'ampleur après la guerre, il en fut de même de la puissance de la minorité à l'intérieur de la CFTC.

Il est plus difficile d'évaluer l'impact des changements qui se produisirent à l'intérieur de l'Église catholique. Qu'il suffise de dire que le triomphe éventuel de la minorité au sein de la CFTC et la transformation de celle-ci en CFDT n'aurait peut-être pas eu lieu, si des forces de gauche n'avaient pas été aussi actives à l'intérieur même de l'Église catholique. Ces groupes ont contribué à changer les attitudes traditionnelles de beaucoup d'ouvriers catholiques ainsi que d'autres groupes de la communauté catholique.

Cette minorité mit en tête de ses objectifs la déconfessionnalisation de la CFTC et sa transformation en un organisme séculier, ce qui ouvrait la voie à l'acceptation d'un programme socialiste.

Pour Vignaux et les autres dirigeants de la minorité, une telle transformation devait conduire à un changement plus radical qui visait au regroupement en un mouve-

ment unifié de tous les syndicats à tendances socialistes, y compris la FO. Cette nouvelle organisation aurait alors été en mesure d'affronter la CGT communiste.

Ce projet de fusion n'eut pas de suite. Les dirigeants de la FO voyaient d'un mauvais œil une nouvelle organisation laïque, socialiste et non-communiste. D'autre part, la FO s'opposait à la pratique de la CFTC et, plus tard, de la CFDT de chercher à établir une certaine unité d'action avec la CGT communiste.

Même les chefs à tendance conservatrice de la CFTC après la guerre estimaient qu'il était devenu nécessaire de collaborer avec la CGT en certaines occasions. Cette pratique est devenue courante pour les dirigeants de la CFDT et ils favorisent l'unité d'action avec la CGT, même s'ils lui reprochent d'agir seule. La CFDT n'a cependant aucun intérêt à rechercher une union organique avec la centrale communiste, même si on y va de part et de vœux pieux en ce sens.

Les dirigeants de la CFTC ont confiance dans l'adhésion de leurs membres au catholicisme. Il en est de même des chefs de la CFDT, déconfessionnalisée, puisque la masse de leurs membres sont d'origine catholique.

Pour en revenir à la ligne maîtresse de cette évolution, la minorité devint majoritaire au début des années '60 et elle prit la direction de la centrale modifiant les statuts de manière à faire disparaître toute référence à l'Église et à la doctrine catholique. Elle prit également le nom de CFDT. Un petit groupe se retira alors de la CFDT et, après une longue bataille juridique, obtint le droit de conserver le nom de CFTC. Elle compte aujourd'hui environ 100,000 membres, alors que la CFDT en regroupe 800,000.

La transformation de la nouvelle organisation ne s'est pas faite de la façon dont l'envisageaient les chefs de la minorité. À mesure qu'elle mettait au point sa philosophie et son programme, sa direction se tourna vers la gauche, en particulier après les évènements de mai et juin 1968. Elle souscrivit au concept de la lutte des classes; elle proposa une critique néo-marxiste du capitalisme; elle rejeta toute possibilité de réformisme et adopta le socialisme révolutionnaire.

Tout en acceptant le processus de la négociation collective, elle considère les conventions collectives, non pas comme des instruments destinés à protéger des droits et à reconnaître des obligations, mais comme une pause pendant que la classe ouvrière se mobilise pour abattre la société capitaliste.

Tout en accordant beaucoup d'importance à la planification et à la socialisation des moyens de production, un des aspects de ses revendications est l'établissement d'un système d'autogestion. Pour elle, la simple nationalisation des moyens de production n'est pas suffisante, car elle ne peut que conduire à l'établissement d'une société-étatiste. La répugnance de la CFDT à approuver le programme politique du groupe communiste et socialiste en 1972 s'expliquait par le refus de ce regroupement politique d'endosser l'autogestion. En ces dernières années, le parti socialiste français dirigé par Mitterand s'est montré plus favorable à l'autogestion d'où il résulte que plusieurs dirigeants de la CFDT ont adhéré au parti socialiste et qu'un nombre de plus en plus grand de militants en sont devenus membres.

À la CFDT, on considère le mouvement syndical comme un instrument de transformation révolutionnaire qui ne peut en aucune façon être subordonné à un parti politique. La CFDT défend l'indépendance du mouvement syndical dont l'objet est de promouvoir les intérêts des travailleurs même en régime socialiste et d'autogestion. Pour elle, les intérêts des travailleurs ne correspondent pas toujours avec les intérêts

de l'État. C'est là l'indice que le genre de socialisme qu'elle préconise diffère du marxisme soviétique ou chinois. Au plan international, la CFDT maintient des liens avec certains des mouvements syndicaux socialistes européens, mais elle cherche encore davantage à s'identifier avec les mouvements de libération du tiers-monde et elle critique avec force le gouvernement américain en qui elle voit le cœur même de l'exploitation capitaliste.

Toutefois, la CFDT doit faire face à certaines difficultés du fait qu'elle a admis dans ses rangs un grand nombre de membres à tendances idéologiques diverses: maoïstes, trotskistes, anarcho-syndicalistes. Ces fractions d'extrême-gauche ont proposé nombre de modifications au programme du mouvement lors de son congrès de mai 1976. Une modification soumettait que les travailleurs exercent un rôle majeur en menant la lutte pour abattre le capitalisme. Une autre modification proposait qu'elle prenne la tête de la lutte en faveur du socialisme. Ces deux propositions furent battues, mais la première ne fut défaite que par un vote serré, tandis que la seconde recueillait l'appui de 25 pour cent des délégués. Le même phénomène s'est produit, lorsque, au niveau international, un groupe proposa la fusion de la Confédération internationale des syndicats libres (CISL) et de la Confédération mondiale du travail (CMT). Enfin, lors de l'élection du bureau national, les forces minoritaires de gauche ont mobilisé leur force contre le leader de la fédération des métallurgistes et ont failli le battre. Ironie, c'est cette même fédération qui, il y a 15 à 20 ans, s'était faite le fer de lance de la transformation de la CFTC en CFDT.

Il est difficile d'expliquer la vitesse de l'évolution des gauchistes au sein de la CFDT. Le programme mis au point en 1970 a comme ouvert la porte à la politisation de l'organisation qui est ainsi devenue une proie facile pour des militant jeunes, actifs et politisés. Il n'est pas facile non plus de voir comment l'unité pourrait être restaurée. Il est apparent que l'action politique des dernières années a affaibli les cadres syndicaux de la CFDT. Depuis les années 50 et 60, une des sources de la force de la centrale se trouvait dans la présence de jeunes chefs venant du secteur privé où leur philosophie pragmatique leur donnait un poids considérable aux tables de négociation dans les entreprises de métallurgie et de produits chimiques. Depuis les dernières années, la CFDT semble moins efficace dans ces secteurs, parce que des négociateurs résolus, tenaces ont cédé la place à des chefs plus politisés.

À l'heure actuelle, on parle d'une crise interne à l'intérieur de la CFDT et le secrétaire général Edmond Maire, tout en s'efforçant de minimiser cet état de crise, reconnaît que la centrale doit maintenant lutter contre le «cléricalisme» marxiste et une certaine forme d'infantilisme fondé sur le marxisme mythique mis de l'avant par les penseurs d'après 1968.

La CFDT a continué cependant de conserver sa force de représentation au cours des années.

Comment évaluer cette évolution du mouvement syndical français? Il faut constater qu'une minorité restée fidèle à la doctrine sociale de l'Église, a refusé de suivre le mouvement de déconfessionalisation et conservé le nom de CFTC. On aurait pu croire que l'Église catholique aurait favorisé ce groupement, mais tel ne fut pas le cas, celle-ci s'en tenant à une attitude de neutralité et, d'autre part, nombre de journalistes et d'écrivains sociaux ont montré plus de sympathie et plus d'intérêt à la CFDT qu'à la CFTC.