

Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



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Culture politique, syndicalisme chrétien Le cas de la Belgique

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Volume 19, Number 3, July 1964

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1021274ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1021274ar>

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Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Barnes, S. (1964). Political Culture and Christian Trade Unionism: The Case of Belgium. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 19(3), 354–378.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1021274ar>

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Political Culture and Christian Trade Unionism: The Case of Belgium

Samuel Barnes

Belgian trade unionism has always intensely attracted industrial relations specialists because of some peculiarities in its structuring and functioning. The object of the following paper is to impart some knowledge about the history of pluralist Belgian trade unionism, its foundation and relationships it entertains at different levels: religious, political, ideological.

The Belgian political culture is congenial to Christian trade unionism, for the existence of socialist, liberal and Christian subcultures enables Christian unions to serve as the working-class segment of a militant Catholicism. Despite the political and economic importance of liberal groups, the appeal of liberalism is weak within the working class. Socialists and Catholics dominate the mass organizations, and both of these tendencies have their own organizations for such socio-economic categories as men, women, children, students, farmers and workers. The Belgian Christian trade union is the *Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens* (CSC — Confederation of Christian Trade Unions). It is a part of the comprehensive *Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien* (MOC — Christian Workers Movement) which includes educational associations, insurance societies, cooperatives and cultural associations.¹ The MOC and the CSC cooperate politically with the *Parti Social Chrétien* (PSC — Social Christian Party) providing a unified direction to the political activities of Christian workers.

Ideological divisions in Belgium roughly coincide with cultural, geographical, and linguistic diffe-

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(1) EVELYN THAYER EATON, *The Belgian Leagues of Christian Working-Class Women*, Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1954, chap. 1, *The Belgian Catholic Social Movement*, pp. 3-44, surveys the origins and growth of the Belgian Catholic Social movement and contains an extensive bibliography in the notes.

rences between the Walloon and Flemish segments of the population. While these differences are also reflected in the labor movement, the trade unions have worked out, on most issues, mutually satisfactory methods of accommodation and cooperation. This success is undoubtedly due to a number of particular features of the Belgian political culture: the Communist party is weak and ineffectual, the socialists are generally moderate and the liberals are accommodating. The role of Christian trade unionism is quite important in this process of accommodation; and, in turn, Belgian political culture has left its mark on Christian trade unionism. Several dimensions of the mutual interaction of political culture and Christian trade unionism must be examined.

Origins

The earliest Belgian unions date from the 1850's when « ideologically neutral » unions were formed. As these unions came progressively under socialist influence, the more devout Catholics withdrew and in the 1880's began to form confessional unions. Although these unions were not directly founded by the Church, their opposition to socialism and the necessities of Catholic politics of the period made them bitterly antisocialist and gave them the reputation enjoyed by so many of their confessional contemporaries of being « yellow » unions.² Nevertheless, despite their religious orientation they were, compared with other Christian unions, relatively free from middle-class and clerical domination. They early acquired a true working-class, blue-collar basis not present in French Christian unionism until several decades later.³ Furthermore, Belgian Christian unions have almost from the beginning concerned themselves with political and social questions as well as economic and religious ones.

Following the organization of trade federations, the first Belgian national Christian confederation was formed in 1909; and after several metamorphoses and the disarray following the First World War, the present CSC was founded in 1923. Before the Second World War its growth was slow, and it did not approach the total membership of the socialist unions. Good relations between the unions date largely from

(2) LEON DELSINNE, « Le mouvement syndical belge dans ses rapports avec la politique », *Revue de l'institut de sociologie*, no 195 (July 1957), p. 409. For a short history, see Delsinne, « The Trade Union Movement in Belgium » *International Labor Review*, vol. 61 (May 1950), pp. 492-521.

(3) MAURICE VAUSSARD, *Histoire de la Démocratie Chrétienne*, vol. 1, Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1956, p. 147.

the Second World War. Although the organizational structure of Belgian unionism was smashed during the occupation, cooperation between the various tendencies, as well as between them and employers, was extensive and mutually attractive.⁴ It resulted in an agreement on social solidarity among the participants in industrial relations which was to improve greatly the postwar climate in employer-union and inter-union relations.⁵ The socialists and minority groups which formed the *Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique* (FGTB — General Federation of Labor of Belgium) in 1945 had hoped that the CSC could be induced to join also, and were willing to assure Christian leaders that they could control their own separate educational activities within the merged organization.⁶ But communists held two of the five secretarial posts at the founding convention of the FGTB.⁷ This fact, coupled with the general climate of relations among the various subcultures in the country, made such a move undesirable from the point of view of the Church; consequently, despite support from some CSC leaders, the attempt at unity failed.

Structural considerations

The CSC has grown faster than the FGTB in recent years. A number of factors may be cited to account for this. It is undoubtedly due in part to the higher birth rate of the heavily Catholic Flanders from which the CSC draws most of its strength, of which more below. The industrialization of Flanders is advancing rapidly, and this largely favors the CSC. Structural changes in the economy, especially the growing proportion of white-collar workers (employés) to blue-collar workers (*ouvriers*), also favor the CSC.⁸ In addition, the long-term

(4) For accounts of the experiences of the CSC during the occupation see the report to the congress of the *Confédération Internationale des Syndicats Chrétiens*, *Procès Verbal, 1945 Congrès*, pp. 80-88.

(5) B. S. CHELPNER, *Cent ans d'histoire sociale en Belgique*, Brussels: Institut de Sociologie Solvay, 1958, pp. 243-244; W. J. Ganshof van der Meersch, *Pouvoir de fait et règle de droit dans le fonctionnement des institutions politiques*, Brussels: Ed. de la librairie encyclopédique, 1957, p. 99.

(6) The story of the merger is told in Joseph Bondas, *Un demi-siècle d'action syndicale, 1898-1948*, Antwerp, 1953, pp. 253-255; and in Ganshof van der Meersch, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-122.

(7) The number of communists was reduced to one in December 1945, and since 1948 all members of the secretariat and bureau have socialist in their political orientation. F. E. Oppenheim, « Belgian Political Parties Since Liberation », *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 12 (Jan. 1950), p. 112.

(8) In the prud'hommes (plant councils) elections of 1950, the FGTB got 80.25% of the blue-collar and 53.28% of the white-collar vote in Wallonia, and 51.66% and 28.77%, respectively, in Flanders. René Evalenko, « Les Résultats », in *Les élections législatives belges du 1er juin 1958*, Brussels, Editions de la Librairie encyclopédique, 1959, p. 280, hereinafter referred to as *Les élections*.

investments made by Catholic groups (both lay and clerical) in organizations for various groups in the population, carried on for more than a generation, have paid off handsomely in the postwar period. The *Jeu-nesse Ouvrière Chrétienne* (JOC — Young Christian Workers) is today of particular importance as a source of recruitment for the CSC. The one-time fear of communist infiltration of the FGTB probably also helped the Christian unions. A final factor which has greatly aided the CSC should be mentioned: the close connection between religion and Flemish particularism, of which more below.

In the early 1960's the Christian unions passed the FGTB in total membership; although both organizations had grown greatly during the postwar period, the FGTB was hurt by the internal disputes arising from the Walloon particularist movement headed by one of its leaders.

BELGIAN UNION MEMBERSHIP

FGTB (1961)	731,347
CSC (1963)	771,576
Others	100,000

Sources : FGTB figures are from the *Yearbook of the International Free Trade Union Movement*, 1961-62, vol. II; CSC figures are from U.S. Department of Labor, *Directory of International Trade Union Organizations*, Washington, 1963. The 100,000 independents is my estimate. While some European union membership figures are sometimes quite unreliable, the Belgian are fairly accurate.

The FGTB, however, is proportionately stronger than its membership figures suggest. The geographical distribution of union membership reflects the historical evolution of Belgian trade unionism: industrialization came first to the Walloon provinces, the French-speaking south of the country. Socialism early gained a foothold there and has remained strong; the Catholicism of many Walloons is more nominal than real. The FGTB outnumbers the CSC three to one in Wallonia; almost 80% of the membership of the CSC is concentrated in Flanders, compared with about one-half that of the FGTB.⁹ Moreover, the FGTB is stronger in principal heavy industries even in Flanders, and around Brussels,¹⁰ so the CSC is weak in larger enterprises. Only the Christian white-collar workers are equal to their socialist counterparts in Wallonia, and Christian unions have a majority there only in factories employing

(9) CHELPNER, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

(10) Brussels is geographically within Flanders, but it is bilingual and forms a third cultural subdivision of the country.

under 200 workers.¹¹ In Belgium as a whole, the FGTB is much stronger than the CSC in the metallurgical industries and among public employees, while the CSC clearly dominates only among white-collar workers in *private* industry.

The close identification of each union with one of the principal regions of the country is of great importance for understanding many trade-union problems. These differences are reflected in the political parties as well as the unions; the Flemings are predominantly Catholic and the Walloons socialist. Coupled with linguistic differences — Flemish (Dutch) has equal status with French as a national language — and separate historical traditions, these differences have several times threatened national unity. Because of each union's clear identification with one side or the other, these national disputes are extremely disruptive of trade-union cooperation. Therefore, Belgian unionism can be understood only within the broader context of the Belgian political system. Belgian unionism is political in both the surface and deeper meaning of the term.

The national organs of the CSC are those common to other trade unions.¹² The supreme authority is the biennial *congress*, but in reality it is more a smoothly run educational device than a decision-making forum. The *council* of the CSC controls financial matters and makes general policy; the *CSC board* insures that the decisions of the council are implemented. The confederation is run by a six-man *executive committee* which includes the president, the secretary general, and the chaplain.

If the national structure of the CSC is the familiar one, the structure at lower levels offers some innovations. Perhaps the most important are the restrictions on the autonomy of local unions. Members belong

(11) T. DE CLERCQ, « Les élections des conseils d'entreprise », *Labor*, vol. 27 (June 1955), pp. 224-226. Elections to conseils des prud'hommes and to conseils d'entreprise in 1952 and 1954, cited by Chelpner, *op. cit.*, p. 293, show the FGTB consistently outdrawing the CSC two to one. These elections are held only in larger enterprises, where the CSC is admittedly weaker. Moreover, all workers, and not only union members, can vote. In addition, the liberal and other small independent unions often cannot put up candidates because of their size. The elections indicate that independent union members and nonunion members in major industries must overwhelmingly prefer the FGTB to the CSC.

(12) This discussion of the organization of Belgian Christian unionism relies heavily on the CSC, *Christian Trade Unions of Belgium*, Brussels: CSC, 1958; and interviews with CSC president August Cool, Aug. 1959, and secretary general Louis Deraeu, Sept. 1959.

to the trades centers of their trade, industry, or service. Collective bargaining and policy-making are the responsibility of the seventeen trades centers, which correspond to the category federations of most other national confederations and which like them are generally organized along industrial lines. With one exception, the thirty-three regional federations coincide with the administrative districts of the government. These regional federations coordinate area union activities and services and are responsible for the recruitment and training of new members as well as for regional administration. Dues are collected by special agents appointed by the regional federations, not by the local unions, and are divided among the federations, the trades centers, and the national confederation. In addition to paying administrative costs, dues are used by the trades centers to pay benefits to workers or their dependents at the time of marriage, births, retirement, and death; and part of the income of the CSC is channeled into a central resistance fund which pays substantial benefits to members participating in approved strikes. This latter arrangement is a major instrument of centralization within the CSC, as it puts the confederal staff itself in control of strike funds.

The leading figures of the CSC are the president and secretary general, and the president in particular seems to dominate Belgian Christian unionism to a remarkable degree. In addition to his high status within the CSC, the president in 1961 was president of the European Organization of the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions and had been a leader in committing Christian unionism to European integration.¹³

Although the CSC is predominantly Flemish, a great effort is made to reconcile the two cultural groups within the confederation. When the president is Flemish, the secretary general is Walloon.¹⁴ At meetings of the executive committee, everyone speaks his native tongue but all top leaders must be bilingual. At national congresses and other mass meetings, on the other hand, there is an instantaneous translation of all proceedings.

The internal organization of the CSC does not differ greatly from that of numerous other trade unions. But to understand the position

(13) R. COLIN BEEVER, *European Unity and the Trade Union Movements*, Leyden : Sythoff, 1960, pp. 256-257; and Samuel H. Barnes, « Christian Trade Unions and European Integration : Organizations and Problems », *Relations Industrielles*, vol. 17 (Jan. 1962), pp. 15-33.

(14) Interview with Louis Dereau (secretary general of the CSC), Sept. 1959.

of the CSC in the organizational structure of Belgian social Catholicism, mention must be made of the MOC, the Christian Labor Movement of which the CSC is a part.

There are three levels of the MOC — local, regional, and national.¹⁵ On each level there are trade unions, mutual insurance societies, cooperatives, and leagues for young Catholic men (JOC), young Catholic women (JOCF), Catholic working men (KWB) and Catholic working women (KAV). Political action is coordinated on each level by political committees which assume much of the responsibility for speaking in the name of Christian labor even if the words are those of the CSC. The MOC is a valuable source of recruitment and training of both leaders and members of the CSC; it supports, for example, a Central Christian Workers College.¹⁶ Much of the successful expansion of the CSC since the Second World War has been due to the base laid by the MOC and related organizations.¹⁷

The very thoroughness of organization within the Catholic sub-culture and the extensive social welfare structure it supports suggest one of the reasons for the continued existence of dual unionism: the organizational disruption resulting from trade union unity would interfere with careers, welfare programs and innumerable local arrangements. The established patterns of expectations within a functioning organization militate against change despite numerous advantages which might derive from altering the present structure of the trade-union movement.

Religious Issues

Relations between the CSC and the Church, as well as the union's social and economic philosophy, have been influenced by the particular

(15) For an organizational chart of the MOC see Michael P. Fogarty, *Christian Democracy in Western Europe, 1820-1953*, Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1957, p. 198. J. N. Moody, « Contemporary Catholic Social Action in Belgium », in Moody, ed., *Church and Society: Catholic Social and Political Thought and Movements, 1789-1950*, New York: Arts, Inc., 1953, pp. 299-317, and Msgr. A. Brys (then general chaplain of the CSC), *The Principles and Organization of the Christian Labour Movement of Belgium*, Courtrai: MOC, n.d., both survey the activities of the MOC.

(16) Jean Nihon, « Workers' Education in Belgium », *International Labour Review*, vol. 77 (Mar. 1958), pp. 220-238. This article points out the impressive educational activities of Belgian labor.

(17) CHELPNER, *op. cit.*, p. 264, emphasizes the importance of these organizations in the postwar expansion of the CSC, as does Val R. Lorwin, « The Seamstress and the Artist: Reflections on the History of Labor Organizations in Belgium and France » (unpublished manuscript).

adaptation that Belgian Catholicism has made to the secular state. In the nineteenth century, Belgian Catholicism achieved a working arrangement with the liberal state which the Church was unable to achieve in many other European countries. Catholics participated in the establishment of modern Belgium with the full backing of the Church and have remained deeply committed to the preservation of the liberal state. Although the liberties of the Belgian constitution conflicted with the Catholic opposition to « modernism », the constitution was tacitly exempted from *Mirari Vos*, the encyclical of Gregory XVI (1832) which condemned modernism; and, indeed, the encyclical was not even published by the Belgian hierarchy.¹⁸ Belgian Catholicism has found that the liberal state, while itself religiously neutral, can be used to defend the interests of the Church. To accomplish this, both political action and activity in the socio-economic field are necessary.

While Belgium is a Catholic nation, Catholicism is but one of three major political ideologies which dominate its politics. The appeal of liberalism is primarily to the business and professional middle class; it is socialism which competes with Catholicism for the political allegiance of the masses. The MOC, described above, is the Catholic movement for combatting socialism within the working class by integrating the worker into a Catholic subculture. The CSC is the trade-union organization within the MOC.¹⁹ The religious position of the CSC must be understood within the context of the Church's political concerns and its imposing structure for defending its interests.

While the CSC and its predecessors have been essentially lay organizations, relations between Christian unions and the Church have always been close. Clergymen were formerly deeply involved in the affairs of the unions. The Rev. Ceslas Rutten was longtime secretary-general, and a former engineer who became a Jesuit, Rev. Joseph Arendt, held several positions in the CSC in the decades before 1944. Today, however, the Church considers the CSC to be essentially a socio-economic organization which should rightfully be directed and controlled by laymen. In order to be effective as a trade union it must

(18) HENRI HAAG, « The Political Ideas of Belgian Catholics, 1789-1914 », in Moody, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 290-291.

(19) It should be noted, however, that there are no formal religious tests for membership in the CSC; it welcomes anyone who accepts its program. CSC president Cool estimates that 30% of the members of the CSC are nonpracticing Catholics. Interview, Aug. 1959.

maintain a distinction between its trade union and religious activities. It is this distinction which separates the activities of the MOC and CSC. The CSC can and does concentrate on trade-union affairs. That is not to say that it is not concerned with religious questions, but these are apt to arise as much from the concern of Catholic citizens with religious problems as from any organizational connection. Community of interest and communality of culture are much more important than organizational connections in tying the union to the Church.

There is in fact no direct organizational tie with the hierarchy apart from chaplains of the CSC.²⁰ There is a national chaplain, one at each trade central headquarters, and one for each region. The latter two categories are appointed by their local bishops; the national chaplain, by all the bishops of Belgium and is responsible only to them. The confederation, however, has a role in his appointment: he is selected by the hierarchy from a list of three priests presented by the CSC.²¹

The formal role of the chaplain is limited to giving advice on moral questions. He is responsible for insuring that the organization's policies are acceptable to the Church. Although he has the formal right to veto proposals of the group to which he is assigned, CSC leaders claim that this power has not been used in a quarter of a century. The chaplains attend the meetings of the groups to which they are assigned, and the national chaplain is *ex officio* a member of the CSC executive committee. Bishops also appoint chaplains for the local unions, but these are seldom concerned with matters relating to industrial relations, over which the local unions have little control anyway.

The influence of the chaplain in Belgian Christian unionism seems to be personal and informal. His formal position chiefly has the effect of insuring that he is informed as to what is going on within the organization. It gives him little direct control over industrial relations, in which the CSC is very much a lay organization.

Within the context of Belgian politics it seems natural that the CSC and the Church should be close. The new course of the Church inaugurated by Pope John XXIII may have improved the climate of inter-union cooperation, but it did not start a movement toward trade-union

(20) Interview with Canon A. De Smet, general chaplain of the CSC, Sept. 1959.

(21) Interview with August Cool (president of the CSC), Aug. 1959.

unity. Contrary to the situation in several other countries, there seem to be no compelling arguments in favor of looser ties between union and Church. Ideology, geographical concentration, political orientation, and its own organizational strength — all these make the connection between the Church and the CSC seem the optimum arrangement both for providing maximum influence for the union and for furnishing a mass base for Catholic political activities. As a result of the strict divisions of the Belgian political culture, Church and unions must unite for mutual support. It is therefore not surprising that the CSC does not publicly complain about Church policy, as has been the case in Quebec and France. Whatever dissatisfaction exists is suppressed. While tensions between the demands of religion and of industrial relations are inevitable, and private negotiations between the Church and union undoubtedly exist, they almost never reach the level of open debate.

Ideological Issues

Belgian Catholic social action has in many respects been a model for other countries. Belgian Catholics have devoted careful attention to the problems of divergent group interests and to economic and social reform. Organizations for articulating and aggregating these interests have been developed. Theoretical justification of social action has been articulated.

There have been two comprehensive doctrinal statements issued by the CSC. In 1926, *The Nature, Organization, and Program of Christian Trade Unions* was published as a general manual.²² The passage of a quarter of a century dated it, and in 1951 a committee of theorists and trade-union leaders published *Christian Trade Unionism — Its Nature and Mission*.²³ Perhaps the key to an understanding of the doctrinal position of the CSC is contained in a statement from *Christian Trade Unionism*: « Christian social doctrine is not an economic and social doctrine dealing with technical questions, but a social ethic relating to the socio-economic organization of society. »²⁴ Social doctrine deals with the ends of society and perhaps suggests structures for achieving these ends, but it does not provide a blueprint to follow.

(22) *La nature, l'organisation, et le programme des syndicats ouvriers chrétiens*, Brussels : CSC, 1926.

(23) *Le syndicalisme chrétien — sa nature et sa mission*, Brussels : CSC, 1951.

(24) *Ibid.*, p. 41.

This conception of Catholic social doctrine leaves the CSC free to act pragmatically in day-to-day trade union matters while adhering to strict orthodoxy in theoretical matters. Compared with other Christian union movements, ideology seems to play a relatively small role within the CSC and there is no evidence of deeply rooted ideological divisions within the movement as in other countries.

Those who emphasize national temperament might attribute this lack of ideological concern to the dominance of the so-called stolid and pragmatic Flemings within the CSC, as opposed to the Gallic abstractions of French-speaking trade unionists whether in France, Quebec, or Wallonia. A more acceptable explanation would emphasize the importance of participation in power. The CSC is an important organization within the Belgian labor movement. The CSC and the FGTB together almost completely monopolize the voice of labour in the councils of government. In addition, as will be shown below, the CSC is an important voice within the Social Catholic party, a party of diverse labor, farm, business and professional groups. To be politically effective the CSC must reconcile its labor and Catholic orientations. Lengthy statements of long-range aims and radical plans for reform would greatly complicate this task. The CSC must weave a devious course between what is desirable and what is possible. The very success of Belgian politics in general requires that the demands of ideological groups not be total and uncompromising in all that does not threaten the basis of a group's existence. The CSC tends to be uncompromising only in matters affecting the rights of the Church.

While Belgian political subcultures are rigid in their organizational separateness and ideological orientations, they are pragmatic and flexible in operation: « ... political parties and social movements have shown an ability on the brink of crisis to compromise on, postpone, or even put aside aims which threatened the bases of national or social consensus. »²⁵ To a considerable degree, the possession of influence has replaced the abstract theorizing of the French and Canadian Christian unions. In these two countries the very lack of power of the unions encourages flights of fancy.

The general principles of the CSC are those of social Catholicism. It emphasizes the dignity of man and labor, the importance of home

(25) VAL R. LORWIN, « All Colors but Red » (mimeographed paper prepared for the Committee on Comparative Politics, Social Science Research Council, 1960).

and family, the superiority of voluntarism over statism, and the orientation of welfare needs toward mutual security funds and Church-related agencies rather than the state.²⁶ On the level of industrial relations, the CSC seeks to achieve social and economic democracy through the direct participation of workers in the management of industry and social welfare organizations. It is opposed to nationalization as a solution to economic problems. It is not dogmatic in its opposition, but believes that nationalization is an inadequate solution to the problems of contemporary life.

Some of its proposals for structural reforms of the economy have already been adopted. Since 1945, national joint labor-management councils with a legal basis have existed for industry-wide collective bargaining. Since 1948, works councils have been established within the plants to deal with a limited number of questions.²⁷ On the national level two advisory councils have been established, with their memberships composed of employers and unionists in equal numbers. The central economic council advises the ministry of economic affairs, and the national council of labor assists the ministry of labor. Problems of industrial relations are often thrashed out in labor conferences, with parliament sometimes merely ratifying the accords reached by management and labor.²⁸

The CSC would like to see the powers of non-governmental bodies extended greatly.²⁹ Co-management and co-determination are desired. These would be the methods of the CSC for achieving public control over the economy without the intervention of the state. This trend, already endorsed by Belgian labor, represents a triumph for the outlook of the CSC, for the FGTB would generally have preferred nationalization and governmental control had not the strength of the CSC and the Social Christian party made this goal unrealistic. In summary, the CSC has avoided the ideological debates of France and Quebec. It has a number of accomplishments to its credit in the field of reform of

(26) *Le syndicalisme chrétien — sa nature et sa mission*, passim.

(27) See Groupe d'Etudes d'Economie sociale de l'Institut de Sociologie Solvay, *Les conseils d'entreprise en Belgique*, Brussels: Ed. de la librairie encyclopédique, 1952.

(28) This point is emphasized strongly by Ganshof van der Meersch, *op. cit.*, passim, especially pp. 169-173; and by Lorwin, « All Colors but Red », *loc. cit.*

(29) Resolution of 1953 congress, in *Bulletin mensuel de la CSC*, vol. 21 (Oct. 1953), pp. 572-574; and Louis Dereau (secretary general of the CSC), « Le syndicalisme chrétien en Belgique », *Labor*, vol. 26 (June 1954), pp. 332-335.

structure, and its primary goal is a continuation and amplification of these existing achievements.

Relations with Other Unions

Considering the deep cleavage in Belgian society between socialism and Catholicism, it is not surprising that there is now little questioning of the principle of dual unionism. Any attempt to unite the labor movement would have to overcome deeply rooted ideological and historical forces which favor the continuance of the present divided labor movement. The Belgian pattern in practice has been to accept these differences as given, and to attempt to coordinate the policies and tactics of the two confederations in their dealings with the government and employers. This has been accomplished largely by close contacts between leaders, with few joint activities below the elite level.

The historical origin of dual unionism in Belgium is in general the same as in other countries which have Christian unions today: confessional unionism is a response to the socialist dominance of the early union movement. Although the first Belgian unions contained practicing Catholics as well as anticlerical and antireligious socialists, the increasing dominance of the latter led the Catholics to withdraw to form confessional unions. These early Catholic unionists were often considered traitors to the working class. Indeed, their opposition to socialism often made them pro-employer. Moreover, many of them served as strikebreakers in crucial periods in Belgian labor history. As a consequence, relations between the two movements before World War II were generally characterized by mutual distrust and hostility.

The maturation of the Catholic unions and the moderation of the socialists have greatly improved relations. Certainly since the Second World War there has been no reason to consider the Catholic unions any less pro-labor than the FGTB. While the changes in the two confederations have greatly improved relations between them, they have not led to much progress toward unity. There has been no real effort in that direction since the euphorious days of 1945. Moreover, there is no indication of serious dissatisfaction within the CSC at its separate existence. The most recent statement of doctrine by the CSC reaffirmed the Christian union's attitude toward socialist unions:³⁰

(30) *Le syndicalisme chrétien — sa nature et sa mission*, pp. 54-66.

In countries where Christianity has retained a living meaning accepted by a large majority of the population, unified trade unionism is a good formula and perhaps an honest solution. But where ideologies . . . manifest complete divergences and even violent oppositions, unified trade unionism is neither desirable nor possible.

. . .

. . . the fact that socialist unions profess a reformist socialism has not changed anything, because reformist socialism remains Marxist. The organizations have only been frightened by the totalitarian character of Marxism, which devours its own children as well as those of others. But the socialism of Western Europe, of which so-called neutral trade unionism is an integral part, remains above all anti-religious and particularly antichristian. That is the principal and permanent obstacle to an organized collaboration between Christian unions and neutral unions. If British and American trade unions, at their worst, claim a sort of « open laicism » which leaves a place to Christians, the trade-union leaders of Western Europe, apparently neutral, but fundamentally socialist, are followers of a « closed laicism » which, in fact, is not only anticlerical, but above all antireligious.

This is the standard Catholic justification of dual unionism. There is, however, a practical reason for the reluctance of the CSC to seek even closer forms of unity short of total merger.

CSC leaders are aware that the individual Catholic worker, compared with the socialist, is likely to be rural in background, unsophisticated in organizational politics, conservative by temperament, and in general poorly prepared to compete successfully with socialist workers within the same organization. This may increasingly become less true, due to the economic evolution of Flanders and improved leadership training of many Catholic youths in the past generation. But Catholic leaders feel that close organic unity between the two unions, despite their near numerical equality, would probably result in a severe diminution of Catholic influence. Consequently, their policy is to keep the

faithful rigidly segregated from contacts with alien influences.³¹ It is remarkable how successfully this can be accomplished with the thorough network of organizations which the Belgian Church has established, and of course the CSC is one of the most important of these. While separate unions are thus deemed essential to the preservation of the interests of the Church, the CSC has resolved the following :³²

It remains disposed to collaborate, at highed echelons, with other trade unions. Mutual contacts and experience will indicate how far this collaboration can go in any particular case.

The Congress equally feels that common meetings at the base should be avoided.

While there is minimal contact at the lower levels, the opposite is true at the confederal level. CSC leaders maintain excellent professional and personal relations with the leaders of the FGTB. They do not, however, deal extensively with socialist politicians. It is a phenomenon of Belgian interest group tactics that organizations deal politically principally with politicians of their own political culture. Thus when labor reaches common decisions, the lobbying efforts necessary to implement them seldom cross the boundaries of political cultures. When CSC officials must deal with socialists in governmental positions, relations are likely to be formal. Christian union leaders talk primarily with Catholic politicians and FGTB leaders with socialists. Even though it is admitted that trade-union and political questions are related, the distinction between them is maintained. The contact which exists on the level of industrial relations does not seem to carry over extensively into political affairs.

On matters of industrial relations communication is usually good. The two trade unions agree on most issues and try with remarkable success to present identical briefs to the government and employers. While agreement between the two confederations are sometimes formal, there exists no formal interunion structure for reaching agreement. Informal contacts and meetings seem to serve adequately. A formal

(31) Lorwin notes this result of the organization of interest groups along ideological lines, « All Colors but Red », *loc. cit.*

(32) Resolution of the 1953 congress, in *Bulletin mensuel de la CSC*, vol. 21 (Oct. 1953), p. 600. Italics mine.

structure for ratifying accords exists in the national council of labor, and its advisory opinions carry great weight with the government. But the council includes employers in its membership, so that the labor delegates must still use informal channels to work out common stands with which to confront the employers. On most issues, agreement between the FGTB and the CSC insures a united front of labor, for the other unions are largely without influence on most public-law bodies.

Partisan party issues are the ones which tend to divide the two confederations. While they have learned to accommodate one another on many matters of industrial relations, their relations with the two largest parties of the country make it difficult to secure agreement on all the many issues which have broad political implications. When the Socialist party dominates the government, for example, and the Catholics are in opposition, the CSC is less likely to acquiesce in governmental policies. In such a situation, of course, the FGTB would tend to be accommodating. When the Social Christian party is in power the situation is reversed. When their ideological partners are in power, the unions are loath to embarrass them for general reasons; but to these should be added the practical benefits which accrue to a union from having a friend in power. These benefits may vary from mere assured access to decision makers to favoritism in appointments and other material rewards.

The confederations are not able, consequently, to ignore their political differences, and most of the major crises of postwar Belgian politics have found the unions on opposing sides. The controversy over the king, the dispute over the amount of state aid to denominational schools and the reform of the welfare services were all issues with broad political ramifications. Each of them interrupted temporarily the close cooperation between the confederations and threatened to poison permanently the spirit of mutual accommodation so essential to the attainment of the material goals of both the unions.

To summarize, the deep divisions in the Belgian political culture are reflected in relations between the socialist and Christian unions. There is little contact between the lower echelons of the two movements. Christian leaders are fearful of contacts of the rank and file with the opposite subculture. Christian labor discipline is facilitated by the high degree of centralization within the CSC. Relations between the leaders of the two confederations are generally excellent. There is considerable

agreement on matters of industrial relations, and the confederations are generally able to present a united front to employers and the government on these matters. But recurring crises in interunion relations have resulted from the differing political orientations of the two movements, and these must be examined next.

Relations with Political Parties

Just as the fragmentation of Belgian politics into socialist, Christian and liberal subcultures dictates the pattern of relations between the CSC and the Church and the FGTB, it also commits the CSC politically to the Social Christian Party.³³ If this political connection seems today to be in general satisfactory to the CSC, such has not always been the case. Belgian Catholic politics has been concerned, first and foremost, with the defense of the rights and property of the Church, including, in particular, the protection of Catholic schools. Before the extension of the suffrage, and the consequent rise of the socialists, conservatism was the basic mood of Belgian politics. The incomplete mobilization of Catholic voters and the divisions among them, as well as the restricted suffrage, tended to make Catholic politics conservative, defensive, and authoritarian. Even during the period between the world wars, the Catholic labor movement was underrepresented and largely ineffectual in politics.

The educational work of past generations has paid off since the Second World War, and Catholic mass organizations today form an

(33) For background on Belgian unions in politics see René Hislaire, « Political Parties », in Jan A. Goris, ed., *Belgium*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1945, pp. 93-107; Ganshof van der Meersch, *op. cit.*: F.E. Oppenheim, « Belgian Political Parties Since Liberation », *loc. cit.*, pp. 99-119; Oppenheim, « Belgium: Party Cleavage and Compromise », in Sigmund Neumann, ed., *Modern Political Parties*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956, pp. 155-168; Léon Delsinne, « Le mouvement syndical belge dans ses rapports avec la politique », *loc. cit.*, pp. 391-461; and the publications of the Institut Belge de Science Politique, especially its series of election studies. A. Simon, *Le parti catholique belge, 1830-1945*, Brussels: La Renaissance du Livre, 1958, surveys the Catholic party up till, 1945, and contains an extensive bibliography. On Belgian elections, in addition to the works cited, see Roger E. De Smet and René Evalenko, *Les élections belges: explication de la répartition géographique des suffrages*, Brussels: Institut de Sociologie Solvay, 1956. For a criticism of the methods and findings of this work see J. Stengers, « Regards sur la sociologie électorale belge », *Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles*, vol. 10 (Jan.-Mar. 1958), pp. 122-174. For the response of Evalenko to Stengers see Evalenko, « Regards sur la sociologie électorale belge », *Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles*, vol. 10 (July-Sept. 1958), pp. 413-444. For a general source on Belgian elections see Roger E. De Smet, René Evalenko, and William Frayes, *Atlas des Elections Belges, 1919-1954*, Brussels: Institut de Sociologie Solvay, 1956, 2 vols.

efficient recruitment and training base for Catholic politics. The structure of the Catholic party was altered after the Second World War when a unified party based on individual membership replaced the loose prewar organization of « estates » of labor, the middle-class, and farmers, further subdivided into Walloon and Flemish wings. Furthermore, as many of the educational and organizational advances made were in the mass organizations, the influence of Christian labor vis-à-vis middle-class and agricultural groups within the party augmented considerably. Christian labor today has the votes, and in addition has the organization, to convert numerical strength into political influence within the party. It was largely as a recognition of the importance of labor that the party was reborn after the war as the *Social Christian Party*, dedicated to a vast program of reforms which emphasize social security and economic democracy. The change in the title from Catholic to Christian was to signify its nonconfessional attachment to the Christian basis of Western civilization rather than to specifically Catholic doctrine. But this attempt at nonconfessionality has been abandoned in practice, if indeed it was ever taken seriously, and the party is in fact as Catholic as its predecessor. It is, however, as « social » as any party in Belgium. While the PSC is still called the « right » of Belgian politics, this is because of its religious nature and Belgian historical memory rather than its present socio-economic policies.³⁴ On socio-economic questions the Liberals are much more conservative than the Social Christians, although the PSC contains an influential conservative wing.

The PSC is the largest party in the country and the Socialist party second in votes obtained.³⁵ But the Liberals are indispensable to any coalition unless the Socialists and Catholics can agree on a program, or

(34) Compare the socio-economic policies of Belgian parties as revealed in their 1958 electoral platforms: Camille Deguelle, « Les plates-formes électorales », in *Les élections*, pp. 13-54.

(35) The results of the last two elections for the lower house were as follows :

	1961	1958
PSC	41.5%	46.5%
Socialist	36.7	35.8
Liberals *	12.3	11.1
Communists	3.1	1.9
Flemish Nationalists	3.4	2.0
Independents	3.0	2.8
	100.0%	100.0%

* Following the 1961 elections the Liberal Party reorganized and changed its name to the Party of Liberty and Progress. Election results taken from *Kessing's Contemporary Archives*, 1961, p. 18108.

unless the PSC should happen to win an absolute majority of seats (as it did in 1950 with only 47.69% of the vote). This is difficult to accomplish under the Belgian system of proportional representation. Like its counterparts in other European countries, the Belgian Liberal party has not acquired a mass following, and is not a major electoral rival of the PSC. The *bête noire* of the Catholics is the Socialist party. Never as doctrinaire as many other European socialist parties, the Belgian party is very moderate in its contemporary outlook. The Belgian Socialist party has followed the general trend of European socialism toward a reformist welfare state outlook; and it has several times entered into coalition with the PSC and Liberal party. Christian union leaders are quite aware of this mellowing of outlook, but as yet there has been no appreciable slackening of opposition to the party.

Relations between the FGTB and the Socialist party are even closer than those between the CSC and the PSC. Before the Second World War, the socialist unions were a subdivision of the Labor party, the forerunner of the present Socialist party. When the FGTB was formed, this organic tie was broken in order to encourage trade-union unity where political unity was unthinkable, but informal ties between the Socialist party and the FGTB are very strong. Unlike the CSC, the FGTB does not prohibit union leaders from holding political party positions and several have done so.

The CSC is closely associated politically with the PSC but there is no organic connection between them. And unlike in the FGTB, no CSC official may hold any important political position (i.e., even local positions in communes above 15,000 population).³⁶ Union officials may run for office provided they have the permission of the bureau of the CSC and have consulted with the central headquarters of the trade central or regional federation which employs them, in which case their trade-union position is vacated for the duration of the campaign. They do not have to resign until and unless they are elected, but those who run without permission lose their trade-union posts. The intent of these restrictions is to separate trade-union and political party functions. They also have the effect of insuring that all Christian trade-union political activity is exercised not only on behalf of the PSC but also in a manner satisfactory to the CSC. And the CSC has been quite effective in con-

(36) Resolution of the 1953 congress, in *Bulletin mensuel de la CSC*, vol. 21 (Oct. 1953), p. 590.

trolling the political activities of its leaders : while there are CSC members who have been active in the Socialist party, there are no CSC officials among these mavericks. The participation of a CSC official in any party except the PSC would not be tolerated.³⁷

The CSC defends political action as being a necessary adjunct of trade-union action. It maintains that many questions cannot be resolved merely by agreements between workers and employees : they require a political solution. Thus, the CSC « must be able to carry out discussions and conclude agreements with political groups, have friends as technicians in parliament, have the necessary authority and influence to achieve its aims. »³⁸ In defence of its relationship with the PSC, the CSC states : « The influence of the CSC cannot be limited to a few political friends, nor even to a single political party. It is indispensable, for a trade union, that its influence be exercised on all governments, whatever might be their composition, and on the parliament itself; but it is desirable that it be able to count on the aid of a friendly party and on the effective collaboration of its own friends. »³⁹

On the formal level it is the primary responsibility of the MOC, not the CSC, to represent Christian labor in politics. But the CSC is a constituent part of the MOC, and the union is too important not to dominate the electioneering of the *Mouvement*. Moreover, the CSC furnishes most of the leadership of the MOC and generally acts as its directing organ. Wherever possible, however, top CSC leaders and the union itself have tended to remain in the background. This is done not only to maintain the actual independence of the CSC vis-à-vis the party but also to keep the union's public image separate from that of

(37) Interview with August Cool, Aug. 1959.

(38) Resolution of the 1953 Congress, in *Bulletin mensuel de la CSC*, vol. 21 (Oct. 1953), p. 591.

(39) *Ibid.*, p. 592. According to an important doctrinal statement (*Ibid.*, p. 593), the CSC must adhere to a party which (1) guarantees the possibility of a Christian life, (2) guarantees a social policy satisfactory to workers, and (3) guarantees liberty and democratic structures. Only the PSC seems to qualify : after the liberation in 1945 some Catholics, mostly Walloons opposed to « political Catholicism », formed the *Union Démocratique Belge*, a nonconfessional party based on Christian principles. While it too seems to have met the three point criteria demanded by the CSC, it disappeared after the first postwar election. A statement of the Cardinal Archbishop of Malines which stressed « the necessity of unity among Belgian Catholics » did not improve its showing in that election, although the Cardinal did not, however, specifically condemn the *Union*. Oppenheim, « Belgium : Party Cleavage and Compromise », *loc. cit.*, pp. 158, 161; and Vaussard, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-183.

the party. This has been important especially in Wallonia where the socialists are strong and the PSC conservative, and where the union would like to expand in what is basically an anticlerical area. It caused somewhat of a stir in 1958, therefore, when the secretary general of the CSC — himself a Walloon — strongly urged CSC members to vote for the PSC.⁴⁰ The political influence of the CSC is greater in Flanders, where Christian unionists are more numerous. It is likely that demographic factors will accelerate this trend toward increasing both the importance of Flanders and of Christian unionists within the PSC.⁴¹ On the other hand, the possibility that industrialization could lead to a counter tendency should not be overlooked: the industrialization of Flanders may create an environment in which the Socialist party could operate more effectively, due to demands for governmental services and rising expectations, as well as the decline in the intensity of particularism and religious feeling. The liberalization of Catholic politics is an attempt to avoid such a development.

It is obvious that the CSC is an important source of election support for the PSC. It is less obvious what the union gains from this close connection with the party. Perhaps the first important gain is the general one of having a potential government which is sympathetic to its *Weltanschauung*. It means on the material side that the CSC will receive preferential treatment in the distribution of governmental largesse in the form of seats on commissions, a friendly atmosphere for recruiting, and the innumerable small favors at the disposal of a friend in power. It also insures to the CSC a direct line to decisionmakers, the right to participate in and to be consulted on socio-economic matters. To a considerable extent, the two largest unions possess this right anyway, but informal access is far superior.

(40) MARCEL LALOIRE, « Les groupements professionnels et les élections » in *Les élections*, pp. 201-202.

(41) Percentage of the popular vote cast in each of the four regions of Belgium in 1925 and 1958

	1925	1958
Flemish cantons	48.02	54.16
Walloon cantons	40.23	32.60
Brussels cantons	11.12	12.58
Eastern cantons	0.63	0.66
	100.00	100.00

The decrease in the Walloon share of the vote is quite dramatic. Although located in Flemish territory, Brussels is so heterogeneous that it must be treated as a separate cultural region. The eastern cantons contain Belgium's small German speaking minority. From Evalenko, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

There are negative aspects of the connection with the PSC too. No matter how carefully the CSC maintains its independence of the party, it is much more difficult to oppose that party's governmental policies than those of a Socialist government. The CSC is under considerable pressure from the Catholic milieu of which it is a part to go down the line in support of a Christian government's policies. And there is direct pressure on the union from the government itself. Participation in the spoils brings responsibility, or at least the necessity for assuming the mantle of restraint. In the context of Belgian labor politics — indeed, any union politics — this is often a severe handicap, for it sometimes causes the union to appear to be a captive of the government — unaggressive, compromising, and compromised. Thus when the PSC is in power, the FGTB appears even more decidedly the aggressive union; while when the Socialists are in the government, the CSC seems to become much more aggressive.

Political Culture and Trade Union Pluralism

Political differences often poison relations between the two confederations and vitiate the power of Belgian labor. When labor unity is broken, the confederations are forced into closer ties with their political allies. This is of less consequence to the FGTB, for its leaders have great influence in the Socialist party which is, after all, predominantly a working-class party anyway. But the PSC, despite its truly « social » nature, is, like other confessional parties, a socially integrative party which cuts across class boundaries. The influence of labor within that party has been increasing steadily, but it is not a labor party — middle-class and agrarian interests are still very important.⁴² Consequently, the CSC must balance the gains of close ties with its political subculture against the losses to labor of division among the trade unions. It is for this reason that there is no closer integration of party and union, and why it is unlikely. The present measures of independence permit the CSC to keep a foot in both the party and trade-union camps. Successful fulfillment of its role requires that it reconcile these two loyalties.

(42) While the urban-rural division does not correspond exactly to the labor-non-labor division, it is indicative of the relative strength of labor within the PSC that the Catholic party received 35.47% of the urban vote and 53.13% of the nonurban vote in 1958. Evalenko, *op. cit.*, p. 256. The exact criteria used to distinguish urban and nonurban cantons are not stated, but the cantons classified as urban are listed. *Ibid.*, 255n.

A major breakdown in union cooperation usually results from far-reaching causes: the virtual collapse of the Belgian political system itself as a device for alleviating conflicts and reconciling differences. The best of trade-union good will and statesmanship cannot insure the smooth functioning of a political system with the internal strains and fissures of the Belgian. The ties to the political culture — the ties of language, ideology, and region — often prove stronger to the unions, and to unionists, than the claims of economic group.

This brief analysis suggests why Christian unions are necessary in Belgium. In a fragmented political culture interest groups, especially those which are also mass organizations, exist largely *within* a culture; seldom do they exist *across* cultural boundaries. While trade unions are first and foremost instruments of economic defence, in Belgium, and elsewhere, their activities extend far beyond any narrow conception of collective bargaining. Ultimately, Belgian unions are concerned with all public questions, and this concern involves them in the broadest dispute of the society — the clash of political cultures. The demands of the two cultures are irreconcilable within the confines of a single confederation as long as the conception of the role of trade unionism is broad. Separate unions permit cooperation on matters of industrial relations and simultaneous participation in separate political cultures.

CULTURE POLITIQUE ET SYNDICALISME CHRÉTIEN: LE CAS DE LA BELGIQUE

La culture politique belge est intimement liée au syndicalisme chrétien. Malgré l'importance politique et économique des groupes libéraux, le libéralisme a peu d'attrait pour la masse ouvrière. Les socialistes et les catholiques dominent les organismes populaires et ces deux tendances ont leurs propres organisations pour les hommes, les femmes, les enfants, les étudiants, les fermiers et les ouvriers.

Le syndicalisme chrétien belge s'appelle la Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens et fait partie du Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien qui englobe les associations éducatives, les sociétés d'assurance, les coopératives et les associations culturelles.

En Belgique, les divisions idéologiques coïncident d'une façon générale avec les différences culturelles, géographiques et linguistiques entre les Wallons et les Flamands. Toutefois, dans le mouvement syndical, on en est arrivé à une certaine coopération.

ORIGINE

Les unions belges remontent à 1850, mais, en 1880, les unions confessionnelles commencent à se fonder. Faisant suite à l'organisation de fédérations de métiers,

la première confédération nationale chrétienne fut fondée en 1909 et la confédération actuelle apparut en 1923. En 1945 les socialistes et les groupes minoritaires fondèrent la Fédération générale du Travail de Belgique.

LES STRUCTURES

La C.S.C. grandit plus vite que la F.G.T.B. ces dernières années. En 1961, la F.G.T.B. comptait 731,347 membres, la C.S.C. en comptait 771,576 en 1963 et les autres 100,000.

La structure de la C.S.C. est la suivante : 1 — Le Congrès; 2 — Le Conseil, 3 — Le Bureau. Un Comité exécutif de six hommes gouverne la C.S.C. et comprend le président, le secrétaire général et l'aumônier. La C.S.C. est une section du Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien.

LA QUESTION RELIGIEUSE

Alors que la C.S.C. et les fédérations qui l'ont précédée sont des organisations de laïcs, les relations entre les unions chrétiennes et l'Eglise ont toujours été très étroites. Aujourd'hui, toutefois, l'Eglise considère que la C.S.C. est une organisation essentiellement socio-économique qui doit être dirigée et contrôlée par des laïcs. Pour être efficace une union ouvrière doit maintenir une distinction entre les activités syndicales et les activités religieuses.

LA QUESTION IDÉOLOGIQUE

Pour la C.S.C., la doctrine sociale chrétienne n'est pas une doctrine économique et sociale en ce qui a trait aux questions techniques, mais une éthique sociale en ce qui regarde l'organisation socio-économique de la société.

Cette conception de la doctrine sociale chrétienne permet à la C.S.C. d'agir librement sur les problèmes journaliers tout en adhérant à une orthodoxie stricte sur le plan théorique.

LES RELATIONS AVEC LES AUTRES UNIONS

A cause de la différence marquée entre le socialisme et le catholicisme dans la société belge, le principe de la dualité syndicale est facilement accepté.

On tâche autant que possible de coordonner les politiques et les tactiques des deux confédérations dans leurs relations avec le gouvernement et les employeurs. Ceci se réalise par des contacts fréquents entre les dirigeants des deux centrales tout en limitant les activités conjointes au dessous des officiers supérieurs.

LES RELATIONS AVEC LES PARTIS POLITIQUES

La division de la politique belge entre les socialistes, les chrétiens et les libéraux détermine la nature des relations entre la C.S.C., l'Eglise et la F.G.T.B., et rapproche la C.S.C., sur le plan politique au Parti social chrétien.

Les relations entre la F.G.T.B. et le Parti socialiste sont encore plus grandes que celles qui existent entre la C.S.C. et le P.S.C. La C.S.C. est intimement liée

politiquement avec le P.S.C., mais il n'existe aucune connection organique entre eux, et, contrairement à la F.G.T.B., un officier de la C.S.C. ne peut détenir un poste politique important.

LA CULTURE POLITIQUE ET LE PLURALISME SYNDICAL

Les différences politiques minent les relations entre les deux confédérations et amoindrissent le pouvoir des travailleurs belges. Lorsque l'unité syndicale est détruite, les confédérations sont obligées de s'associer davantage à leurs alliés politiques. Quoique cela soit facile pour la F.G.T.B., cette association est plus difficile pour la C.S.C.

L'influence de la C.S.C. à l'intérieur du P.S.C. s'est accrue graduellement, mais celui-ci n'est pas un parti ouvrier car les intérêts des classes moyennes et des agriculteurs y sont encore très importants.

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