



# The Present Position in the French Trade Union Movement

by

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*The French trade union movement of today may be divided into four main branches. The General Confederation of Labour, which has the largest membership, at its last congress adopted a programme which defines its national and international policy after the withdrawal of the Communists. The main problem before the General Confederation of United Labour since its establishment has been affiliation and general relations with Moscow. It has also attempted to establish a "united front" for the defence of the workers interests with the General Confederation of Labour, but was met with a refusal to co-operate. The claims of the Catholic trade union federation are not noticeably different from those of other trade unions, but it also has its own peculiar problems: its relations with the Church, with other workers' organisations, and with the employer, especially the Catholic employer. Yet another form of trade unionism, "independent" or Evolutionary Syndicalism, is represented by the Council of Industrial Legislation and Labour. The aim of this body is the organisation of each industry by the creation of permanent joint committees corresponding to the local, regional, and national organisations of employers and workers.*

As a consequence of the rupture in December 1921 the French trade union movement has split up into two large organisations: the General Confederation of Labour, always known as the C.G.T. (*Confédération générale du travail*), and the General Confederation of United Labour, known as the C.G.T.U. (*Confédération générale du travail unitaire*). The two organisations are also absolutely apart internationally as well as nationally. The C.G.T.U. is affiliated with the Red Trade Union International, while the C.G.T. has remained a member of the International Federation of Trade Unions at Amsterdam.

The exact membership of these two bodies is difficult to determine. Trade unionists are not very closely linked to their organisations, which still keep their traditional character of bodies established primarily for militant action. In most countries the unions rest on a broad and varied basis; they demand a high subscription, but, on the other hand, they offer various material benefits such as unemployment or sickness payments. This is not customary in France, except in a very few federations — e. g. in the book trade. However, for some little time past there has been a tendency to study this policy, which

is as much a mutual aid policy as it is a trade union policy ; this is at any rate so among the organisations federated to the C.G.T. The federations of metal workers and of hide and leather workers have under consideration the creation of unemployment insurance funds. Nevertheless, in general, French unionists look on their organisations simply as bodies formed for purposes of defence, or, possibly, of attack.

The result is that membership varies so much as to prevent statistical compilation. Groups of workers often join a union on the outbreak of a strike or are won over by a definite campaign for specified ends ; those ends obtained, they stop paying their subscriptions, only to rejoin the same organisation at a later date. Such causes making for instability are a part of French tradition ; to them must be added the confusion resulting from the rupture. District associations, federations, and constituent unions have split into two halves, or else, where the majority have sided with the C.G.T., a new organisation has been established by the minority of members. Sometimes, as in Meurthe-et-Moselle, the Department organisation has been maintained intact although the unions themselves have broken up.

An estimate of the membership of the old C.G.T., however, gives a figure of about 700,000. The membership of the C.G.T.U. is generally supposed not to exceed 300,000. To these two bodies must be added the French Confederation of Christian Workers (*Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens*). This confederation unites the Catholic trade unions and has a membership of about 125,000. Another body drawing its membership of about 100,000 chiefly from among salaried employees, especially from among bank, stock exchange, and commercial clerks, has assumed the name of the Independent (*Indépendante*). Mention only will suffice of the Reformist unions and of the National Confederation of Labour (*Confédération nationale du travail*) ; these bodies are of little influence or weight. In the following pages an attempt is made to indicate the chief characteristics of each of these organisations.

### THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR

The General Confederation of Labour or C.G.T. is the traditional organ of French trade unionism. It is still organised on its old and well known lines, consisting either of industrial federations or of district associations of trade unions. The industrial federations are composed of members working in all the crafts of the industry, grouped into so-called 'technical sections'. The district associations usually consist of trade unions in the Departments. The C.G.T. is managed by an Administrative Committee (*Commission administrative*), which is appointed by a National Committee of the Confederation (*Comité national confédéral*) ; this National Committee, which meets every quarter, is composed of delegates of all the industrial federations and the Department associations. The National Committee also appoints

the officers of the Confederation, who, at the moment, are Messrs. Jouhaux (General Secretary), Lenon, Million, and Lapierre (Assistant Secretaries), and Calveyrach (Treasurer). The official organ of the Confederation is a monthly paper called *La Voix du Peuple*. It also owns a daily paper, *Le Peuple*.

A general congress is held every two years; the last before the rupture was at Lille in July 1921, and the first after the rupture at Paris, in the Orleans Palace, on 29, 30, 31 January and 1 February 1923.

### *Present Organisation of the General Confederation*

The last mentioned congress brought very great alterations in the organisation of the C.G.T., although, as a matter of fact, not all the proposals for reform (the most important of which was put forward by the Association of Trade Unions of the Rhone) came up for discussion. The congress confined itself to regulating the question of strikes and to reforming the system of representation of the unions at the congress.

On the strike question new articles in the constitution were voted as follows:

*Article 28:* Local trade unions decide as to collective strikes in their own industries. The local union shall keep its national federation, its local association, and its Department federation informed as to the negotiations preceding the declaration and calling off of the strike. Any decision to extend a strike to other districts but within the same industry requires the consent of the competent federation.

*Article 29:* The assistance of the representatives of the C. G. T. shall not be given except on demand from the federations taking part in a collective dispute.

*Article 30:* The objectives — i.e. the demands — for which a collective dispute has been called cannot, under any circumstances, be modified on account of the intervention of organisations called upon to direct or support it. Movements started for purposes of support or solidarity and intended to give more force and acuteness to collective disputes cannot modify the objective to be attained.

*Article 31:* National federations decide as to general collective disputes covering a whole industry. National federations must necessarily, in the case of disputes of this range, inform the Administrative Committee, and, as far as possible, before the stoppage of work occurs.

*Article 32:* The Administrative Committee, if on examination it is of opinion that a dispute involving the whole of an industry is likely to involve other bodies and to create a grave national crisis, shall decide on an immediate consultation of the national federations interested; shall recommend such federations to summon emergency sessions of their federal national committees; and shall also decide to summon the National Committee of the Confederation.

*Article 33:* National federations shall be entitled, with a view to obtaining support for their action in conducting a general collective dispute in their industry, to bring to the notice of the Administrative Committee any suggestion whatsoever for a general strike to cover more than one industry or the whole industrial system. They must, however, in support of their proposal be able to prove the actual extent of the movement within their own industry.

*Article 34 :* The National Committee of the Confederation shall alone be entitled to examine and pronounce on any proposal for a general strike to cover all industries. A resolution to call a general strike in all industries cannot take effect unless it obtains a two-thirds majority of votes of all the federations represented, such majority to be calculated on the basis of numerical importance and type of industry. The majority must be inclusive of those industries which on account of their weight in the national industrial system are in a position to make the general strike effective.

Briefly, the National Committee is alone entitled to organise general strikes or strikes involving more than one industry. Further, should a federation wish to extend a stoppage of work to other federations, it must prove that the movement within its own industry covers the majority of undertakings within it. The importance of the latter condition, which the experience of the last few years has dictated, is obvious. The collapse of the membership and influence of the C.G.T. in 1919 and 1920 was undoubtedly to be traced to incessant strikes — strikes which were at first collective disputes, on which were grafted sympathetic strikes, then movements involving a whole industry, and, finally, under pressure from extremist elements, general strikes.

These new articles in the constitution illustrate perhaps more clearly than anything else the changed policy of the body which stands at the head of the French trade union movement. The suggestion to regulate strikes is surely a renunciation of the old policy of pre-war days which was built up on the wish to provoke the largest possible number of strikes so that the proletariat might be trained, by means of these "revolutionary gymnastics", for the great final struggle of the general strike. Cases occurred, according to Mr. Lapiere, in which "the support of the whole membership roll of two federations was given to a trade union organisation whose own membership was obeying the strike order only to the extent of 35 per cent."

Another reform also is the obvious outcome of recent experience, namely, the alteration in the amount of representation allowed to the different unions. Students acquainted with the history of French trade unionism are aware that this problem has long been under discussion. The demand of the reform party before the war was one for proportional representation. The system was argued to be inadmissible whereby a union consisting of seven members — which was as often as not a merely fictitious body existing for the purpose of providing such and such persons with seats at the congress — should enjoy the same rights as a powerful organisation of many thousand members. Proportional representation, however, had always been rejected at these labour congresses. It was feared that it might result in the crushing out of weak bodies which had only just started on their career by the old and well established unions which had enjoyed the support of political parties; the tenet of one union, one vote, irrespective of the size of unions, was at that time a protection against attempts at pressure from the Socialist Party. The problem reappeared, however, after the war. The very application of the principle of one union, one vote, tended at times to give Anarchist and

Communist elements a preponderant voice in the C.G.T. and encouraged Communist penetration within the unions. The Confederation, having now been relieved of extremist elements in consequence of the rupture, is in a position once more to take up older theories of reform and allow a favourable hearing to the principle of proportional representation.

As a matter of fact, the Congress did not so much adopt proportional representation as what, in the words of Mr. Dret of the Hides and Leather Union, we may call "progressive representation". The new articles adopted determine the system of voting as follows: one vote for a membership of 7 to 50; two votes for a membership of 51 to 100; three votes for one of 101 to 250; four votes for one of 251 to 500; five votes for one of 501 to 1,000; and one additional vote for every 2,000 or fraction of 2,000 members above the first 1,000. The new arrangements were completed by the addition of a clause giving representation without voting power to unions having less than 7 members.

Other reforms in the internal constitution of the C.G.T. were also adopted. Unions must now affiliate both with their industrial federation and with their Department association. They may not affiliate with bodies working in opposition to the defined objects of the C.G.T. at the same time as they affiliate with bodies connected with the C.G.T. itself. The National Committee acquires the right to suspend the membership of unions pending a decision by the Congress. These new disciplinary regulations are an attempt to avoid a repetition of the incidents of 1921. "The trade unions", Mr. Lapierre has stated, "cannot possibly any longer allow a noisy and irresponsible minority of delegates, representing a negligible minority of the workers in their industry, to set at nought the decisions arrived at by the regular organisations constituting the congress of the Confederation".

In short, the C.G.T., enormously swollen in numbers after the war, was feeling the defects of its constitutional and disciplinary arrangements. The complete autonomy which had been permitted to the constituent organisations left the way open to every sort of political adventure; a collection of two million persons cannot be administered and directed on the same lines as a small group. But the C.G.T. had at this time to cope with the intoxication of revolutionary ideas which had seized hold of the masses, and the existing constitution proved but an inadequate defence against demagoguery; it was bound to succumb. The splitting off of the extremist minority in December 1922 made re-grouping and reform possible, and the work has now been going on quietly for a year. Special agents were appointed to manage an active campaign of propaganda, and after a recovery of the larger portion of its membership the C.G.T. at length resolved to remodel its constitution to agree with its policy.

### *Policy of the Confederation*

The policy inspiring the C.G.T. was once again most forcibly defined at the recent Paris congress. The points adopted were

reconstitution of trade union organisations on a new basis by the setting up of unemployment insurance funds, raising of subscriptions, action, going outside and beyond a defensive policy, for social reform, remodelling of the tax on wages, placement, nationalisation of industry, evolution of modern individualist society towards socialisation by the creation of a National Economic Council, and abroad close co-operation with the International Federation of Trade Unions at Amsterdam and the International Labour Office. To these questions the active members are now devoting themselves, feeling at length free of the irritating problems of general orientation.

A lengthy report on the subject of the National Economic Council was presented to the congress; the congress re-affirmed decisions and recommendations already adopted at the previous congresses of Lyons, Orleans, and Lille. The carrying on of the enquiry instituted in 1920 by the C.G.T., with the support of technical workers, civil servants, and co-operators, has been, it must be admitted, greatly affected by the crisis in the trade union world which terminated in the rupture. It is the aim of the Confederation to take it up again and press it. The Confederation has declared itself resolved "to set up an organ which will substitute for the principle of confused individual interests a principle of the common good and of the co-ordination of all parts of the national economic system". The problem is to find remedies, to introduce system into production, to give each man his proper part to play, and the solution of the problem, according to the C.G.T., is nationalisation of industry and of the state services. Schemes must be drawn up by each industry or each public service (unless this has already been done). The National Committee has already, as a matter of fact, drawn up and issued schemes for the industrial nationalisation of the railways and mines. These schemes substitute for sole direction by an individual or individuals a system of collective management on which all grades of all the chief groups concerned shall be represented — producers, consumers, the central government, the Departments, and the communes.

The enthusiastic championship of this policy by the C.G.T. since 1919 shows what a great alteration has taken place in the outlook of the leaders of the trade union world. They no longer confine themselves to barren criticism or condemnation of the existing social system; on the contrary, their aim is to cause those principles of justice and organisation to penetrate which they have adopted in the conduct of their own affairs. They no longer despise participation in the work of the existing organs of society; thus Messrs. Ray and Dubreuil were appointed by the C.G.T. as delegates to the Apprenticeship Council.

Together with the principle of the nationalisation of industry the C.G.T. champions that of workers' control. The demand is set forth in the form of a statement that "the first claim to be made good within the sphere of labour interpreted in its strictest sense must be based on workers' control, which must operate as

respects engagement and discharge, enforcement of the terms of collective agreements, especially on questions of wages, hours, discipline, and penalties, and application of industrial legislation and of the legal rights of the worker”.

Systematic organisation of productive processes and defence of labour's rights are accordingly the two poles about which the home policy of the C.G.T. revolves. At the same time, the leaders recognise that all efforts in either direction will be in vain unless they are supported from the international side. Different national economic systems are so entangled together, by reason of their varying capacities for production and their similar needs, that mutual solidarity is becoming a more and more obvious need and obligation. This implies the unavoidable regulation of productive processes throughout the world in order to equate them with consumption. This is the only way of avoiding national conflicts.

International action thus arises naturally as a consequence of the economic policy adopted by the C.G.T. The C.G.T. is an enthusiastic adherent of the International Confederation of Trade Unions at Amsterdam, a body which it helped to establish, and of which Mr. Jouhaux is vice-president. Together with the International the C.G.T. has co-operated in efforts directed towards the reconstruction of Europe and the restoration of the world balance upset by the war, in the enquiries conducted in Upper Silesia and the Ruhr basin, in maintaining the rights of labour in Hungary and Spain, in humanitarian relief work in Russia; more especially has the Confederation made the most energetic efforts to obtain recognition of the principle of collaboration between the nations on the reparations question. The League of Nations is viewed as a great new and hopeful organisation destined to assist humanity. The C. G. T. has definitely supported it by a campaign of incessant propaganda, and Mr. Jouhaux has devoted himself, on the bodies of the League itself, at times with success, to advocating the reduction of armaments and to seizing every opportunity which arose for the maintenance of peace. Quite recently, on 12 February, Mr. Jouhaux made the following declaration in the name of the workers :

We, the undersigned, having been appointed by the organised workers of almost all countries to represent labour interests on the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, and having been chosen by that Office, at the request of the Council of the League of Nations, to collaborate in the work of the Temporary Mixed Commission, feel bound to call attention to the following :

That the work of the Temporary Mixed Commission, which aims at the limitation of armaments, cannot produce any useful results except in so far as it is adapted to a situation of moral disarmament ;

That one of the conditions calculated to hasten this moral disarmament is the promotion of “international co-operation and the achievement of international peace and security” (first paragraph of the Preamble to the Covenant of the League of Nations) ;

That the present European situation cannot be described as favourable to the development of this co-operation and to the realisation of moral disarmament, which is the precursor of material disarmament ;

That, in view of this situation, it is the duty of the League of Nations to seek for ways and means by which moral disarmament may be secured, in view of the fact that "the League of Nations has for its object the establishment of universal peace" (Preamble of Part XIII of the Treaty of Peace);

That, moreover, the Assembly of 1922 solemnly affirmed that this was its desire by adopting Motion No. 16.

For these reasons, we ask the Temporary Mixed Commission to insert this declaration in its minutes in order that the Council of the League of Nations may duly take note thereof.

The policy of the C. G. T. representatives in the International Labour Organisation is well known. It is guided by principles of internationalism and universal peace. The C. G. T. aims at helping on the reconstruction of a world thrown out of equilibrium by the war and considers that the workers have here an important part to play; the force inherent in the world of labour is to be added to the legal force of the institution established by the Treaty of Versailles. Ever since 1919 members of the Confederation have been delegates at every International Labour Conference and session of the Governing Body and have at no time lost sight of the aims of their organisation. The principal obstacle in the way of international industrial legislation is, of course, the existing disparity in the distribution of raw materials and in the volume of production; the C. G. T. has, so far as in it lay, supported the enquiries into world production, unemployment, and other subjects conducted by the International Labour Office. In its own country it has endeavoured to make the usefulness of the Office known to the working classes, to defend it against attack, and to get Draft Conventions carried out.

The national and international policy of the C. G. T. are completely co-ordinated. French trade unionism, while not for a moment relaxing its insistence on the revolutionary ideal, is attaching more and more importance to a programme of reform, to industrial legislation, and to the study of those great economic problems towards the solution of which it wishes to contribute in order to further the progress of society.

The C. G. T. is also making an effort once more to obtain the support of employees in state enterprises. Great disappointment was felt at the neutrality maintained by these workers in the dispute between the C. G. T. and its extremist elements. The Federation of Civil Servants, however, which was greatly weakened in 1921 in consequence of the action taken against it by the Government, but which has now been reconstituted apparently on a stronger basis, has no intention of re-affiliating with the C. G. T. Its aim is on its own initiative to secure the trade union rights at present refused to workers in government employ and its instrument will be an electoral policy which has already produced definite results. The neutral attitude adopted a year ago by the Federation is accordingly being maintained.

#### THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF UNITED LABOUR

The General Confederation of United Labour or C. G. T. U. is far from displaying the same calmness of attitude which the old



central organisation has achieved. Its whole outlook since the rupture may be described in a few words as an increasing and implacable internal struggle between the Revolutionary Syndicalists and the Anarchists on the one side, and the Communists on the other.

The discussion centred wholly round the choice of an International. One party wanted to join the Trade Union International of Moscow and this unconditionally, without even securing guarantees of independence as against the political International, for instance, without securing the abrogation of Article 11 in the constitution of the Red Trade Union International, which prescribes organic connection between the Red Trade Union International and the Communist International. 'First affiliation', was the cry, 'and the demand for autonomy later; it will be for our representatives when received at Moscow to demand the suppression of Article 11. Until then we shall be opponents, but opponents from within a body — that of the great kinship of Red trade unions.'

This attitude naturally secured the support of the French Communist Party. Even the adherents of the policy of 'organic liaison' with political parties, such as Messrs. Tomassi and Monatte, were apparently in agreement; affiliation with Moscow was held to be a pre-requisite and all else was to follow.

As events fell out, the Second Congress of the Red Trade Union International did, as a matter of fact, rescind Article 11, while maintaining a policy allied, both on theoretical and practical points, with that of the Communist International.

The policy of unconditional adherence to the Red Trade Union International was advocated by Mr. Rosmer, an uncompromising Communist, who has been appointed by the Moscow executive as their representative member of the Executive Committee of the French Communist Party. In his view the only essential thing is that the Communist Party, purified of all opportunist or doubtful elements, should march at the side of trade unionism towards revolution, and the first and foremost aim of revolution is the conquest of power — the setting up of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The other view was that preliminary guarantees ought to be obtained, i.e. a clear statement of the independence of the trade union movement from the Communist Party, in fact, the abrogation of Article 11. These demands, or at any rate the last one, obtained satisfaction. 'Our earnest wish', the argument ran, 'is to join Moscow; but we are unwilling to go into partnership without a properly drawn up contract. We are not at all anxious to be thrust out later on, as have been certain members of the Communist Party. We are still firmly attached to the doctrine of revolutionary trade unionism as formulated in the Amiens charter. Our final aim is the transformation of society by the sole means of action taken by the workers themselves; but at the same time we do not wish to let our immediate demands drop. We want no connection between ourselves and any political

parties, even when Communist or Socialist. We left the Amsterdam International because it adopted a policy of collaboration with the International Labour Office and the League of Nations, because it also seemed to us to be marching alongside of the Socialist Internationals ; there is no point in affiliating with the Trade Union International of Moscow if it is merely a reflection of the Communist International. We are willing to hope it is otherwise, but in that case the fact must be made plain by abrogation of Article 11, which will definitely demonstrate both the independence of the International and secure our own. After this has been done we will affiliate.'

This mistrust of Moscow was carried so far as to give rise to a suggestion for the possible formation of another International of revolutionary trade union organisations. Accordingly, Mr. Totti, one of the secretaries of the C. G. T. U., went to Berlin on 16 and 17 June of last year in order to attend a preliminary conference organised by the French C. G. T. U. together with the Italian association of trade unions, the object of the conference being to establish a new and purely trade union International entirely independent of all political parties. The Anarchists, who form the third section of the C. G. T. U., would voluntarily support such a new International. They are most unwilling to affiliate with Moscow, as, in their opinion, the Red Trade Union International is a mere branch of the political Communist International.

" The Red Trade Union International ", we read in the *Libertaire* (<sup>1</sup>), " both by the spirit and the text of its constitution is hampering the autonomy of the working-class movement by closely linking it up with the fate of a political party and an existing state. Should the Red Trade Union International continue to be blind to the need for securing full independence to trade unionism, both in national and in international affairs, the only possible course will be to proceed to the formation of a trade union International which really shall be trade union, supported by all those organisations within the Confederation which have definitely freed themselves from any ties with the government or political parties ".

In the same number of this journal Mr. Wilkens explains the causes of Anarchist mistrust of Moscow. The suppression of Article 11, he argues, will advance nothing. " We are practically convinced, in any case, that the Moscow leaders will accept the suggestion for its suppression in face of the protests raised. " But the whole of the constitution of this International tends " to inaugurate the power of the proletariat ", towards " the dictatorship of the proletariat " ; and, in addition, the constitution is so drawn up as to assign a majority to the Slav countries ; thus the Soviet Republic of Russia with six million trade unionists has 17 delegates, the Ukraine 10 delegates, and various Soviet republics 24 delegates, making 51 delegates altogether. Now in these count-

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(<sup>1</sup>) *Le Libertaire*, 16-20 June 1922.

ries "the Communist party is triumphant . . . there is no trade unionism . . . the workers play a passive part"; while their representatives are mere "disciplined agents of the Communist party". Then come Germany with 6 delegates, Great Britain with 6, Poland with 4, North America with 8, South America with 12, Australia with about 12; Japan, India, Sweden, Norway, Czechoslovakia, the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom, Roumania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, and Finland have each two delegates. "Any hope of getting the trade union point of view accepted would be very slight", and the congresses of the International would be easily able to vote resolutions which would in practice re-establish the connection with political Communism. Trade unionists would be obliged to accept such resolutions or else to submit to expulsion; Article 12, in fact, runs: "Organisations affiliated to the International Federation of Red Trade Unions which fail to carry out the resolutions of the congresses or the decisions of the executive may be expelled by the Central Committee." Now this Central Committee would be in the hands of the Communists.

These rival points of view came into collision during the congress at St Etienne, held from 25 to 30 June 1922. It is unnecessary to comment on the discussions which took place. The Anarcho-Syndicalist members were defeated. They stood for defining the aims of the 'united' organisation not merely as the disappearance of employer and wage earner, but also of the state: they announced themselves as anti-state. Such an attitude was naturally highly displeasing to the Communists, who, after a speech by Losovski, the secretary of the Red Trade Union International, won the day.

The so-called 'trade union charter' of Amiens was in a way buried at the congress of St. Etienne at the very moment when its originator, Mr. Victor Griffuelhes also disappeared from political life. Mr. Griffuelhes himself had, in any case, already abandoned it; his belief in the revolutionary force of pure trade unionism was already dead and he had become a supporter of the thesis that the proletarian dough should be fermented with political yeast.

The problem was whether that yeast should be Communism or Anarchism. Two principles were confronted: the first was that of trade unionism as a power unable to achieve revolution by its own force and compelled to rely on the support of the Communist Party; the second that of trade unionism as a power able to transform society on condition that it was not hampered by a party ready to seize power on the day when the revolution broke out, and that it drew its inspiration from the libertarian doctrine of the suppression of the state. Everything else was of secondary importance, such as the degree of organic connection with political bodies which would be acceptable, the abrogation of Article 11, various amendments to the constitution, etc. The only real tussle was between the advocates of the proletarian state and the opponents of all state organisation. "Trade unionism

is dead", cried Mr. Lorduron, secretary of the Association of Trade Unions of the Loire, when the results of the voting were announced.

Mr. Monmousseau accordingly entered into office as secretary of the C. G. T. U. and Messrs. Totti and Bernard — more especially the latter — led the Anarchist opposition. This opposition was a very strong one and alone constituted over a third of the membership of the congress. It was concentrated in a Committee for the Defence of Trade Unionism, the purpose of which was to defend the charter of Amiens, the independence of trade unionism as against political parties, and pre-war trade union principles generally. The opposition is supported by a majority in the Association of Trade Unions of the Seine; it organises public meetings, in fact, controls the popular side of the movement. A recent meeting, on 30 November, was held under the auspices of the Committee at rue Grange-aux-Belles in connection with the incident of Schapiro, the militant Russian trade unionist who was first imprisoned and then expelled by the Soviet Government.

"In Russia", said Mr. Bernard, "one form of government has merely been replaced by another, one form of servitude by another form of servitude, one militarism by another militarism", and was met from the side of the Communists present with cries of: "Long live the Red Army!" "Down with the Army!" shouted the Syndicalists and Anarchists. Nor did the quarrel stop at words; blows were exchanged. "If we are convinced", said Mr. Bernard, "that the C. G. T. U. representatives at Moscow are sacrificing the independence of the trade union movement to the Communist Party, we should do to you what you Communists advised us to do to the C. G. T. — refuse to pay our subscriptions and join a new trade union International at Berlin."

However, notwithstanding this opposition, affiliation with the Red Trade Union International was ratified by the National Committee of the United Confederation on 5 and 6 March last by 75 to 23 votes. At the same time the opposition of the Committee for the Defence of Trade Unionism became even more marked; the Committee representatives agreed to affiliate with the International Working Men's Association, which has now definitely been constituted by Syndicalist and Anarchist elements opposed alike to the Moscow and the Amsterdam Internationals.

These internal quarrels seriously affect the membership and work of the C. G. T. U. The United Confederation has nevertheless lost no opportunity of making itself felt. It sent delegates to the great metal workers' strike at Havre; above all it conducted a violent propaganda campaign for the withdrawal of the tax on wages at a time when the C. G. T. was afraid to attack the principle of the tax itself and was confining its demands to asking that the minimum of taxable income should be raised to 10,000 francs. The campaign, it must be admitted, was successful, appealing as it did to demagogic principles. Finally, the C. G. T. U. claims to counter 'the employer's reactionary attitude' and the lowering of wages by a 'workers' offensive' directed to the raising

of wages. Mr. Gautier of Seine-Inférieure has suggested starting the movement by demanding all over the country and from all employers a rise in wages of three francs per day. This suggestion has already met with considerable criticism. It is argued that to demand a uniform rise of wages all round is an impossibility ; regard must be had to the industrial situation, or at least some estimate must be made of what rises in wages are possible.

### THE 'UNITED FRONT'

Another topic which has given rise to endless discussion is the ' united front '. While the Communists, who are particularly strongly represented in the United Federation of Railwaymen, are the most violent partisans of the united front, the more Syndicalists are against it. The question would seem to have been more or less disposed of by the refusal to co-operate coming from the C.G.T. The C.G.T. was of opinion that the rupture with the extremists had been final, and has rejected all suggestions for common action made from time to time by the C. G. T. U. However, the confederated Federation of Railwaymen wished to make the attempt, and railway workers who were members of the C.G.T., of the C.G.T.U., and even of the Christian Confederation, started a campaign against the le Trocquer Decree which practically abolished the 8-hour day on the railways (1). A joint meeting was held at the labour offices at Paris. The extremists went further and wanted to try a reconciliation of trade union elements, at any rate on one line, the Orleans line. The suggestion was vetoed by the Federation. The Federation of Miners, among whose members the same suggestion was made, also refused to entertain the idea of a collaboration which in its opinion was undesirable. The general question came in the first instance before the National Committee of the C. G. T. on 13 and 14 October 1922 ; that Committee had to answer the offers of an alliance made by the C. G. T. U.

The task of belling the cat fell to the Association of Trade Unions of Meurthe-et-Moselle, not unnaturally, in view of the fact that this Association has maintained a sort of internal unity. The resolution put forward by the Association ran :

In view of the fact that the pretensions of the employer and the capitalist must at all costs be opposed, the Committee of the Confederation is of opinion that it would be advisable to summon the whole of the workers' forces to unite for the defense of the common interests of the proletariat. Accordingly the National Committee of the Confederation instructs the officers and Administrative Committee of the Confederation to enter into negotiations with the United Confederation of Labour with a view to common action for the defence of the 8-hour day and of proletarian interests.

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(1) On this Decree see the *International Labour Review*, Vol. VII, Nos. 2-3, Feb.-Mar. 1923, pp. 328 sqq. : *The New Regulation of Hours of Work on the French Railways*.

Mr. Georges Dumoulin, however, gave a very categorical answer. "We reject the united front", he said, "with all the contempt which such a formula deserves. The united front? What is it but the hoodwinking of the working classes, the basis of which consists in putting all organisations on a dead level, in an official recognition of the good work done by the secessionists in splitting up the movement. The united front simply means that the trade union movement belongs to no particular set of persons, but that all and sundry have the right to exploit the claims of the working classes. In other words, any victory which may be won will be claimed by the secessionists as theirs, while the responsibility of a defeat will be wholly laid on our shoulders."

Mr. Dumoulin ended amid applause with the advice to the opposite side that it was useless to pursue the idea. The united front, in his opinion, even when restricted to defined purposes, could only lead to confusion. For the hypocritical and narrow-minded thesis of united action must be substituted simply the organic and complete unity of the C. G. T. itself.

The National Committee adopted Mr. Dumoulin's view unanimously except for one abstention. The text of the resolution passed was as follows :

The National Committee of the General Confederation of Labour, in view of the offensive launched by employers and government authorities against the 8-hour day and in view of the general lowering of wages most urgently summons all workers to resist the dangers of the threatening reaction. The blow dealt to the 8-hour Act by large-scale employers with the help of the government, to the detriment of the seamen and the railwaymen, is the clearest and most alarming of indications. The workers in these two industries are energetically resisting this onset.

Not only should all organisations of the Confederation help their fellow-workers who are thus threatened, but it is also their duty and in their own interest to prepare at once for a general campaign of resistance throughout the country. All workers should voluntarily unite in order to checkmate this powerful reactionary movement.

While standing for the thesis of unity the Committee declares itself undeceived by the formula of the 'united front', a formula which merely disguises the desire of a party to obtain a tyrannous mastery over the workers' movement by means of a new device. The Committee notes that there is no sort of similarity between agreements made between federations for well defined ends and the tactics of persons who are more influenced by the policy of groups alien to the whole trade union movement than by the real interest of the workers.

The Committee once more affirms its wish for unity. The rupture, the responsibility for which has been clearly established to the account of those who set up a rival organisation, will never cease to exist until workers are re-united in the same trade unions affiliated with the organisations which are regular members of the Confederation.

The Committee repeats the declaration made by it immediately after the occurrence of the rupture to the effect that the C. G. T., resting at all times on the principles laid down in the charter of Amiens, is open to every worker, without distinction of opinion, on the understanding that there can be no restoration of unity except in the direction of the organisations regularly affiliated to the General Confederation of Labour. The sole condition is that the constitution of the Confederation and the congress resolutions be obeyed; without this guarantee no united working-class movement is possible.

None the less, the rise in the cost of living and the need for 'readjusting' wages have in some degree affected trade union opinion on this point. A motion for the restoration of unity was proposed at the Paris congress by the Association of Trade Unions of Meurthe-et-Moselle, and a proposal coming directly from the C. G. T. U. was also before the congress. The latter proposal was for a joint conference of all unions affiliated with either of the two central bodies, which conference should determine the bases of fusion of those two bodies.

The motion was rejected. The congress of the Confederation voted in support of the National Committee resolution set forth above, and accepted the thesis that unity can only be built up from the bottom upwards, starting from the single union, which union must be a member of the Confederation and regularly affiliated both with its proper federation and Department association.

It may, nevertheless, be noted that quite recently the united front has been achieved in certain organisations, for instance, those of the municipal workers of Paris.

#### THE CATHOLIC TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

The Catholic trade union movement must on no account be neglected by those who are anxious to obtain an accurate view of the variety of French industrial life. The Federation of Catholic Salaried Employees (*Fédération française des syndicats d'employés catholiques*) has a membership of 36,700 persons associated in 160 unions. The Confederation of Christian Workers (*Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens*) includes 23 local and district associations (17 in 1921) and 7 craft federations (3 in 1921); 45 new unions have been established in the course of a year. The Confederation comprises 753 groups of all kinds and has been established in 78 Departments; its total membership amounts to 125,000. It has taken part in a great number of elections to representative bodies; of the fourteen candidates which it presented or supported in fourteen out of the twenty-four groups allowed to labour candidature in connection with the Labour Council, nine were elected, while of seven labour members on the Permanent Committee of that Council three are Christian trade unionists. Internationally it is affiliated with the Christian trade union International at the Hague.

These facts were referred to with some pride by delegates at the various Catholic congresses which met on 4 and 5 June 1922 and more especially in the report made by the General Secretary, Mr. Gaston Tessier, who is a member of the probiviral court of the Seine and also of the Labour Council. A tribute to the power of the Christian trade union movement was also paid by the Bolsheviks when Zinoviev urged his comrades to form the united front even with the proletariat of the Catholic unions.

The demands put forward by the congresses run parallel to those put forward by non-Catholic trade unionists. Thus the congress of the employees' federation voted a recommendation in favour of the Saturday half-holiday, compulsory shop-closing on Sundays, and maintenance of the 8-hour day. The latter is likewise the demand of the metal workers' federation, which rejects all amendment by Decree, also of the textile unions, which opposes all extension of the grant of exemptions, of the congress of the clothing trade workers' union, of the miners, and finally of the Confederation congress itself, which met in Paris, comprising 150 working-class delegates representing every part of the country.

But trade union action has not been confined to resolutions. Considerable efforts have been made to deal with the unemployment situation, for instance, by setting up within a period of a few months only of three workers' co-partnership associations. The Confederation has also attempted to obtain reform of the tax on wages, to defend a minimum level of earnings not below the subsistence level, and to draft a scheme of national insurance for workers. Groups within the Confederation have also taken part in strikes in the Nord and in Alsace.

Catholic trade unionism gives rise to some problems of considerable difficulty. The Confederation of Christian Workers is an organisation on a confessional basis and is bound to have relations with the Church. The President of the Confederation, Mr. Zirnheld, has defined these relations as follows :

Trade unions, are not, nor can they be, organisations for religious purposes ; they are at law trade associations, freely managed by persons in the trade and by these only, and such they must remain. The desire that such persons should direct their union along the true paths will not be successfully attained by slavish obedience to a formula, but only by securing, outside the union but alongside of it, the religious training and education of leaders and members and by recruiting membership from similar circles of opinion.

Moreover, we respectfully address ourselves to those who are in charge of our religious life and allow ourselves, paraphrasing the famous saying of Baron Louis that he could 'give them good finance if they would give him good politicians', to say : 'Give us good Catholics and we will give you good trade unionism'.

Further, consideration is required of the relations which should rightly obtain between the Catholic trade unions and unions affiliated with the C. G. T. and the C. G. T. U. These relations must necessarily be restricted in view of the fact noted by the Catholic unions that "there is one subject at least on which Majority and Minority adherents are agreed, and that is that they consider themselves the sole representatives of the French working classes and the sole depositaries of the trade union gospel and that no one except themselves has any right to pronounce on the defence of trade unionism". It required the storming of one "apparently invincible position after the other", writes Mr. Zirnheld, before "the right of taking part in collective agreements, denied to us alike by the employers and the members of the C. G. T.", was secured to the Catholic unions.



The question, however, is whether the united front proposed by the C. G. T. U. is a possible contingency. Mr. Zirnheld extends formal recognition to the solidarity which links all workers together, but refuses to sacrifice his regard for the "general interest" to the suggestion. He distinguishes between two things as follows :

We cannot forget that we are workers like all the rest and that our comrades in toil are in our eyes, in spite of their errors, indeed, because of those errors, our neighbours, or rather members of that family which the dictates of Christianity and nature alike urge us to foster. Whatever doctrinal divergences or differences of opinion may separate us, our interests are the same, our claims identical. When those interests are unjustly threatened and those claims justifiably put forward, charity and justice alike bid us unite in their defence as far as that defence is proper. . . .

But whatever be the strength of the links uniting us with our comrades in toil, however urgent is our wish to see necessary economic and social reforms accomplished, the legitimate character of our rights cannot cause us to forget our duties : working-class solidarity cannot prevent us from respecting the general good. The undeserved injustice attaching to certain social positions cannot persuade us to accept the idea of the class war ; the defects of the existing economic system cannot cause us to approve of either violence, robbery, or revolution.

Loyalty to our fellow workers, unity of action with our comrades for the defence and victory of causes which are just by means which are legitimate we accept, and gladly ; a united front with those who condemn our principles and our doctrine and look to a merciless revolution we reject.

One final issue, not the least difficult of all, arises for the Christian worker : his relations with the employer and above all with the Catholic employer. He does not seem particularly disposed to sacrifice his interests as a worker to confessional solidarity. Mr. Zirnheld is very clear-sighted on the point :

Were the employers' world better acquainted with the character of the French working man, could the employer stoop to examine his poverty and his faults not as a business man nor as a judge but as a brother in Jesus Christ, what treasures of intelligence, good sense, and loyalty would he discover in him and would he be able to set in motion for the greater good of the national productive system ! An enormous gain would accrue to the cause of social justice if it could be driven home to those who direct or one day will direct industry that it is not the worker only who has duties but the employer also, and that the duties of the latter are of all kinds and the greater the higher he is placed in the industrial world. If, finally, the employers' world could realise better that, when certain sacrifices have to be made in order to re-establish the threatened equilibrium of society, it is not the man who has little or insufficient who should be asked to make them, but the man who has much — even if this should entail the surrender of today's material advantage for the sake of future security — how much more distant would be the threat of revolution !

The internal organisation of the Confederation is largely modelled on that of the C. G. T., with federations and Department associations. Questions of trade policy in the strict sense are settled by the craft federations, but the district associations nevertheless must support the attitude adopted, first, by co-operating in the appointment of district trade committees to act as decentralisation agencies of the national craft federations, and, secondly, by collecting all the practical information which is required, in

view of the policy adopted, for the use of the unions and the district craft committees ; such information will cover legislation, the economic situation, wage rates, index numbers of the cost of living, application within the district of industrial law, and so forth.

The real function of the Department associations, however, is to focus the propaganda and administrative work of the Christian Confederation. The organisation of propaganda in the district under the supervision and management of the Propaganda Committee of the Confederation is some of the most important work which the district associations should undertake on behalf of the unions.

The functions of the district associations as towards the central Confederation itself are partly of an administrative and partly of a general character. Their administrative duties include regular correspondence with the executive of the Confederation, the sending of full reports on all unions affiliated with the Confederation, and the collection of subscriptions to the Confederation. Their general duties include in the first place the task of handing on to the separate unions the general instructions issued by the Confederation so as to maintain the unity of the whole organisation. This means that they must be constantly on the watch to see that the constitution of the Confederation is being strictly maintained. The district associations share in the work of general direction through the National Committee ; this places on them national responsibilities which it is their duty to realise. Briefly, the district associations are agencies for decentralising the work of the Christian Confederation and for spreading its spirit among the separate unions and in the districts where unions might be formed. They should combine work for each one of these separate unions with work for the national movement as a whole. Placed alongside of the national craft federations (whose work they can and should support adequately), they fulfil an important rôle which should be decisive for the progress of the Confederation.

Lastly it may be noted that on 4 and 5 June 1922 the Confederation decided to establish ' defence and action ' funds.

#### THE INDEPENDENT TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

Independent trade unionism or Evolutionary Syndicalism is represented by the Council of Industrial Legislation and Labour (*Conseil professionnel de législation sociale et du travail*). This Council is composed of several federations, e.g. the Association of Alsace and Lorraine, the National Federation of Independent Bank and Exchange Clerks' Unions, the National Federation of Commercial Travellers and Commercial Agents, and many other trade union bodies. It is a kind of Confederation of independent unions with a present membership of about 100,000. It is apparently the most important organisation of salaried employees in France. The movement has nothing whatever in common with

so-called 'yellow' trade unionism and its real independence of all political or confessional organisations can hardly be doubted. The recently reconstituted Federation of French Salaried Employees (*Fédération des employés de France*, formerly the *Fédération de Rouen*) has also joined it.

The press organs of the independent trade union movement are *Le Salariat nouveau* (formerly *Le Voyageur et l'Employé de commerce*), published at Paris, and *L'Echo de la banque*, published at Bordeaux; also various trade bulletins.

The theory of the movement has been set forth from time to time by Mr. Gaston Morin, Professor of Law at Montpellier, more especially on the occasion of a demonstration held at Bordeaux on 12 April 1922 under the auspices of the Council for Industrial Legislation and Labour. The first point to note is that Evolutionary Syndicalism is neither a political nor a confessional doctrine; its basis is occupational organisation.

It is an admitted fact that the legal position of a trade no longer corresponds with industrial requirements. Revolutionary Syndicalism therefore preaches the brusque abolition of the present order of society and its immediate replacement by another. Mr. Morin rejects this and, in agreement with independent trade unionist doctrine, stresses the fact that the wage system, even if not the final form to be taken by production, is nevertheless an existing reality which it is impossible to wipe off the slate. The system implies two elements in every occupation: the employers, and the workers. But beyond and above their separate interests there exists in every trade an element of unity: the community of interest between employer and worker on the question of production. The organisation of a trade would mean the legal recognition of this community of interest, in other words, the creation of legal relations between the two elements.

Our present crisis is traceable to the fact that in so far as we have attempted to put the organisation of production on a legal basis we have been inspired by the spirit of the 1789 Revolution. The social philosophy of this Revolution centres in two main ideas which are its great strength, individualism and centralisation in the state. The Declaration of the Rights of Man implies that every man is an absolute sovereign and cannot, except of his own free will, be compelled to enter into relations with any other man: he is constrained solely by a contract voluntarily concluded. Above the individual the French Revolution placed the state, and reconciled the rights of the state with the absolute rights of the individual by stating, through the mouth of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that the supremacy of the state arose out of the Social Contract, i.e. the contract concluded between every individual and society. The state, having once been constituted on the basis of the absolute rights of the individual, was interpreted to be supreme, and national sovereignty, the final expression of individual sovereignty, replaced the ancient divine right of kings. Thus state and individual confronted each other, and between them no place was left for any intermediate power.

The Act of 1884 gave corporate rights to trade unions. The principal advocate of this Act, Mr. Waldeck-Rousseau, held that freedom of association followed as a logical consequence on the absolute rights of the individual but would not admit that a trade union could be a sovereign body limiting those absolute rights as exercised by its members. The Act, therefore, omitted to deal with the collective agreement, the legislator being of opinion that such agreements infringed the absolute rights of the individual. The Act established the trade unions as independent, isolated bodies, destined to come into rivalry one with the other ; they were bodies grouping individual rights.

The later Act of 1892 instituted industrial arbitration and conciliation, but on a voluntary basis, before the local magistrate (*juge de paix*), whose powers in dealing with industrial disputes are severely restricted. Agreement between employer and worker was consequently not advanced by this Act. To attain such agreement was the aim of Mr. Millerand, whose views were definitely anti-individualistic, during the second Waldeck-Rousseau Ministry in 1900. He essayed to establish it by Decrees setting up labour councils, composed of employers and workers, whose function it would have been to intervene as arbitrators in industrial disputes. But the Decrees were violently attacked in Parliament and had to be withdrawn.

It was not, in fact, till 1919 that the legislator at length recognised the validity of collective agreements. After lengthy discussions it was decided — still under the influence of the individualist principles of the Revolution — that such agreements should constrain none but trade unionists, seeing that no contract ought to be made compulsory for persons who had not consented to it. But a collective agreement which is not compulsory on all alike can place trade unionists at a disadvantage over against non-union labour, e.g. in fixing minimum wages rates.

The problem is how to make good this deficiency on the legislative side by organising each industry. Here Mr. Morin has explained " what may be called the ideal programme of Evolutionary Syndicalism ".

Each occupation must be built up on a strong organisation of employers and employed, upon which foundation must be superimposed a system of joint councils composed of representatives of employers' and of workers' bodies ; these joint councils will be permanent bodies and will be found at every stage of organisation as local, district, and national councils. Their functions will be to draw up collective agreements and to supervise their execution ; they will also be called upon to act as conciliators and arbitrators in times of crisis or of threatened strike ; in fact, the joint councils will be intermediaries between the two sides in each occupation and, consequently, first and foremost agencies contributing to industrial harmony. Occupational organisation might even be completed by a system of occupational franchise for the elections of senators.

The above is an ideal scheme. The Council of Industrial Legislation and Labour lay more stress on some intermediate reform, however partial, than on something which can only be realised at a distant date.

It may be recalled that immediately after the 1920 railway strike the Government drafted the text of a Bill on industrial conciliation and arbitration, the purpose of which was to introduce a system of compulsory conciliation in disputes arising in privately owned undertakings; compulsory arbitration as well as compulsory conciliation already obtain in all public services, and the awards are obligatory on either side. The Bill established conciliation committees composed of elected representatives of employers and employed, in fact, joint councils. Unfortunately the establishment of such committees is not made obligatory nor are they permanent. The Council of Industrial Legislation and Labour, while approving of the underlying principles inspiring the Bill, is desirous of amending it in the direction of making the conciliation committees both obligatory and permanent. The suggested amendment is of outstanding importance; bodies would be established which would be capable of acting as a link between the two sides and the collective agreements which they formulated would inevitably become the law of their trade. This would be a first step along the road to the reforms demanded by the Evolutionary Syndicalists.

But there is a further and more important reform to be undertaken, and that is the reform of ideas. Mr. Morin has urged his followers to oppose the current theories of the relation of the state and the individual.

An historical period is about to close, a new one to begin. I do not ask you to abjure the ideas of the French Revolution, that great epoch during which the splendour of France wrote some of the most glorious lines in her heroic epic. We also hold the same faith as was held by the great leaders of that time. We believe that progress means better material conditions and the opening up of intellectual and spiritual resources to the greatest possible number of human beings. But we are unable to imagine that this ideal good will be attained by a proclamation of the Rights of Man, as in 1789. In real life we have to deal not with man but with men; we cannot give rights to all unless we limit the rights of each. In other words, every human being must surrender some of his absolute and sovereign rights. If France, the country of the Rights of Man and the Civil Code of the individual, wants to attain to a new spiritual ascendancy over the world, she will have to become the author of a Social Code of the Rights and Duties of Society (\*).

A few remarks on the practical achievements of the Independent trade union movement may be added. The most recent congresses of Evolutionary organisations were held as follows: Federation of French Salaried Employees at Chaumont on 13, 14 and 15 August 1922; National Federation of Independent Bank and Exchange Clerks' Unions on the same dates at Tours. The resolutions passed at each of these two congresses very clearly illustrate the attitude of either federation. Demands were set forth for the

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(\*) *Le Salarial nouveau.*

8-hour day, the Saturday half-holiday, and a weekly rest-period. On social insurance questions and the tax on wages the attitude of Evolutionary Syndicalism differs slightly from that of the C.G.T. Its most characteristic tenet is the theory of co-partnership, which, in fact, is the basis of the movement. Here a beginning has been made of carrying theory into practice, for Mr. Jean Pourtalier, the general delegate of the National Federation of Independent Bank and Exchanges Clerks' Unions, was able, thanks to the holdings of stock acquired by the Federation, to be present and vote at a shareholders' meeting of the *Crédit Lyonnais* on 24 April 1922 at Lyons.

The above is a general sketch of the French trade union movement. It includes the picture of a C. G. T. freed of its extremist tendencies, still engaged in reforming both its material organisation and its opinions ; of a C. G. T. U. torn between Anarchist and Communist claims and ready for new ruptures ; of a federation of workers in government employ who seem tending towards political action ; finally, of a confessional confederation of workers' unions, and of an independent federation organised on a strictly occupational basis.

