Chapter 2
Europe and the divisions of French trade unionism: a growing awareness

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1. **Introduction**

In the history of European trade unionism, the importance of French trade unionism seems undeniable, although, until the recent arrival of Bernadette Ségol, no President or General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) had come from a French union. Prior to the appointment of the General Secretary, there had almost always been a French trade unionist within the Secretariat of the European organisation, since the appointment of Alfred Misslin in 1973, who was replaced three years later by François Staedelin, who served with Mathias Hinterscheid.\(^1\) This presence is commensurate with the major role played by France in Europe. There is no doubt about the fundamental nature of the speech made in 1950 by Robert Schuman – then Minister for Foreign Affairs – inspired by Jean Monnet, Commissioner-General of the French National Planning Board, which confirmed his desire to create ‘de facto solidarity’ and thus pave the way for the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). He was following the path carved out by inter-war intellectuals and certain politicians with pro-European ideas, in the image of Aristide Briand who in 1929 had developed a plan for a European federal union. As a founding country, France is at the heart of European integration, particularly due to the understanding between its leaders and

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\(^1\) François Staedelin (CFDT) was appointed following the death of Alfred Misslin (FO) in 1975. He remained in the Secretariat until 1986. He was succeeded by Jean Lapeyre (CFDT), Deputy General Secretary from 1991 to 2003, and then by Joel Decaillon (CGT).
their German counterparts. France is therefore in a position to design a Europe matching its ambitions, a Europe of resolutely anti-American states in the time of Charles de Gaulle, but more liberal under his successors, Georges Pompidou and Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, who worked to enlarge and deepen Europe. François Mitterrand, even though his majority included communists hostile to the European project, contributed to the shaping of Europe by refusing to guide the Community towards socialism and instead favouring the formation of a European Union, as well as by encouraging the work of Jacques Delors up to the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty.

However, the referendum held at that time revealed that, aside from the choice of leaders, French society is far more ambivalent: the ‘yes’ camp won only narrowly, highlighting that France as a country was not unanimous about Europe. Between the 1930s and 1950s, a strongly pro-European attitude took hold, however, supported by the Christian Democrats, Liberals and some Socialists. The latter formed a number of movements, ranging from the Socialist Movement for the United States of Europe to the Action Committee for the United States of Europe, set up by Jean Monnet. However, there has long been a kaleidoscope of critical political forces on both the right and the left, from Gaullists to communists. Although the French have been able to accept abandoning part of their sovereignty to the European project in order to maintain France’s place on the world stage, their resolve fluctuates. If the price to be paid is deemed too high, opponents can see their ranks suddenly swell, for a number of reasons, from nationalist repudiation to fears of social waivers, leading them on occasion to form a ‘nation-brake’ (Manigand 2007: 43). Since the mid-1980s, in an unfavourable economic context, the European Union has also become the catalyst for a number of concerns. It is not so much the European ideal that is on the wane, but rather the various forms of European integration, as demonstrated vividly by the debates during the referendum campaign on the adoption of a European Constitution. The debates were most extensive within the Socialist Party: sympathisers in the party rejected, by a majority, a referendum that the internal consultation had supported. This limited majority of 58 per cent revealed the ‘historical crossover’ between socialist and Gaullist voters; from then on, the sceptics were more numerous among the former than the latter (Dulphy and Manigand 2006: 56–57).

The trade union world has not escaped these developments and the approach taken by individual French unions in terms of supporting the European project and establishing the ETUC reflects the diversity of paths. The various unions have joined the European confederation at different times, in line with an evolving perception of Europe. They include CGT-FO – which we will refer to as ‘FO’ hereafter – which was associated with the Western camp and unconditional support for the United States and was also a participant in the foundation of the ETUC as a member of the European Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ECFTU), which is the European branch of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU); CFDT, whose pro-European sympathies have constantly increased over time; and CGT, which for a long time remained on the sidelines, but whose critical posturing did not prevent it from eventually joining the ETUC in 1999.2

Does their joint presence in the European organisation now signal the convergence of their positions on Europe? By assessing their European ambitions over time and their
perception of their role within the ETUC we will be able to answer this question. Following a presentation of French trade unionism assessing the influence of its individual unions, we will look first at views on European integration, particularly by highlighting the times when the French population has been consulted and by placing trade union views within the French context. We will then detail the investment of the various organisations in the ETUC.3

2. Brief overview of French trade unionism

Trade union membership is not compulsory in France. Most trade unions offer workers a choice of membership, but this has not resulted in a high rate of unionisation, which, for the past 20 years or so has been around 7–8 per cent. This rate poses a question about the place of trade unions in France, with marked differences between the public and private sectors. Half of all trade union members work in public service or in a public undertaking, particularly in health, transport, La Poste and France Telecom. Only 5 per cent of employees in the private sector have a union card, mostly in metallurgy and energy (Andolfatto 2004: 166–167). Given this low rate, the relative importance of the French trade unions is now measured more by their results in union elections.

Two organisations dominate the French trade union landscape, accounting for 26.77 per cent and 26 per cent of votes in the 2013 union elections, respectively: the CGT and the CFDT.4 They are the heirs of the two main traditions that have structured the French workers’ movement since the legalisation of trade unions in 1884 by the Waldeck-Rousseau Act (Pernot 2010: 69–103). This allowed the creation of the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) in 1895, which brought together within one movement reformist, Marxist and anarchist activists calling for strict independence from political movements and defending a secular and socialist trade unionism. The second arm of the French workers’ movement developed at the same time within the sphere of social Catholicism and resulted in the creation of a Confédération Française des Syndicats Chrétien (CFTC) in 1919. This was immediately affiliated to the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU), which helped to set it up. It contained a group of non-mixed Christian trade unions – ‘non-mixed’ meaning that they did not combine employers and workers – the most important of which was the Syndicat des employés du commerce et de l’industrie, founded in 1887. Formally independent of the Church, its members declared in their articles of association that they were inspired by the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

The CFTC then became the CFDT, following a decision by the vast majority of its members to make the union non-denominational by removing any Christian reference from its name and articles of association, in order to open it up to the entire working world. This

3. Several types of archive have been used to conduct this study. In addition to the dossiers on relations with the French unions held by the International Institute of Social History (IISH), we have referred to trade union archive centres. We are extremely grateful to the archivists and documentalists who enabled us to find the necessary documents: Annie Kuhnmunch, Nicolas Perrais, Aurélie Mazet and Pascale Rubin. Given the eclectic nature of the sources, which vary from one organisation to another, we have chosen to favour, in addition to the study of affiliation conditions, congress texts and the trade union press. Particular thanks are owed to Pierre Tilly for giving us access to the declassified archives of the US Department of State.

transformation in 1964 marked the completion of a long process of change: the organisation had been turned upside down by the arrival of a new generation of activists who rejected the ‘class collaboration’ advocated by their elders. It was from then on that the organisation, which had been a minority player in the first third of the twentieth century, grew rapidly and began to compete with the CGT.

During this period, the CGT went from between 2.3 and 3 million members in the early 1950s to 1.8 million in 1978 and 600,000 today (figure provided by Pernot 2010: 199). In particular, like all the main French confederations, the distribution of members has changed: whereas in the past manual workers made up most of the members, deindustrialisation and changes in the French economy mean that these organisations attract fewer and fewer such workers. They now account for no more than one-third of members, having been increasingly replaced by white-collar workers, in particular teachers, technicians, managers and engineers. As a result, in 1998 27 per cent of CGT members belonged to this category (Andolfatto 2004: 24). Furthermore, around a quarter of its members come from one of the five main public undertakings (SNCF, EDF, GDF, RATP, La Poste) and more than half are public officials or similar (Pernot 2010: 195).

Its mass nature was called into question when FO was set up by activists denouncing the hold over the CGT exercised by the French Communist Party (PCF), itself under the orders of Moscow, in a Cold War context. Inspired by socialism but opposed to communism, this new union brought together a wide variety of activists, from Trotskyists, through the heirs of anarcho-syndicalism to moderate socialists, which gave it multiple faces. Very small to start with, the new union stabilised only in the mid-1950s, in particular by gaining a foothold in the public sector, before diversifying its recruitment and becoming the third largest French union, with just under 400,000 members (Andolfatto 2004: 25).

FO has developed its position as polar opposite to that of the CGT and CFDT, highlighting its independence from political parties and differentiating itself from those unions in which the social arena has long been subordinated to the political arena and whose leaders have been members of the PCF’s political bureau. Nowadays, however, all unions claim strict independence from political parties. Even before the creation of the CFDT, activists in the CFTC ensured that any links with the Christian Democrat Party – the MRP, of which a number of representatives in the National Assembly in the immediate post-war period were also senior officials in the trade union – were broken by banning members of the bureau and confederal secretariat from cumulatively holding any local or national political office or management position within a party. The CGT also distanced itself from the Communist Party as the party got weaker, with Louis Viannet’s decision in 1996 to resign from the bureau of the PCF symbolically marking the break in direct relations between the political and trade union managements (de Comarmond 2013: 17–65). However, this claimed independence and the fact of allowing members to vote freely – more often than not – do not prevent these organisations from taking part in the political debate.

In view of their membership numbers, stated independence from employers, financing mainly stemming from member contributions, seniority and patriotic attitude during the Occupation (criteria defined since 1945), the CGT, FO and CFDT came to be regarded as representative, allowing them to negotiate and sign agreements ‘on behalf of all workers’, in the same way as the Confédération Générale des Cadres (CFE-CGC) and the CFTC, which were formed by activists who did not agree with making the unions non-denominational and who wanted to maintain a Christian trade unionism based on the social principles of Christianity. In 1968, when exercise of the right to organise in the workplace was recognised
by law, any trade union affiliated to these organisations had to be recognised as representa-
tive within companies or one of their establishments before obtaining the right to negotiate
and conclude collective labour agreements and contracts at this level (Auroux laws).

This measurement of representativeness raised a number of questions at a time
when social dialogue was being pursued at an increasingly decentralised level and the trade
unions were less and less present, weakening the legitimacy of the collective agreements
concluded (Pernot 2010: 314–315). As a result, in 2008 it was decided to measure repre-
sentativeness according to the results of union elections (mainly works councils and staff
representatives) and to set the threshold of representativeness at 10 per cent of votes for
exercising the rights of the trade union section and at 8 per cent at aggregate branch level in
order to be represented and negotiate, with the representativeness of a number of branches
ensuring interprofessional representation. The collective bargaining rules were also amend-
ed: whereas previously agreements were valid provided that one signatory was a member
of a representative organisation, these could no longer be concluded without the backing of
trade unions representing at least 30 per cent of employees’ votes and provided that a coalition
with more than 50 per cent of the votes did not object.

Those organisations that existed solely at branch level—such as teachers’ trade
unions—were also recognised as representative. Teachers were long represented by the
Fédération de l’Éducation Nationale (FEN), which was formed in 1947 as an independent
organisation to avoid having to choose between FO and CGT. They are now mainly repre-
sented by the Fédération Syndicale Unitaire (FSU), several of whose affiliated trade unions
are members of the European Trade Union Committee for Education. On the other hand,
the 2008 reform had an ambiguous effect on small organisations. It made it easier for them
to stand for election to works councils, whereas the previous system had banned them from
such elections. However, frequently below the 10 per cent threshold, they struggle to exer-
cise trade union rights at grassroots level. Among them, the SUD unions, founded in the
late 1980s by activists from the CFDT for La Poste and France Telecom workers because
they were disappointed by the union’s shift towards an increasingly accepted reformism,
are finding things difficult. Influenced by libertarian ideas, they place great importance on
grassroots initiatives and general assemblies. They are also more like community groups,
defending the ‘have-nots’ (people without jobs, housing, documents and so on), and are
committed to alter-globalisation. They represent the most radical pole of the trade union
movement and have remained outside the ETUC. Their numbers have stagnated in recent
years and, at the last union elections, they failed to reach the 5 per cent threshold. Likewise,
the Union Nationale des Syndicats Autonomes (UNSA), which developed from the FEN
in the wake of teachers’ trade unionism, but which is open to other branches and affiliates
independent trade unions, has not managed to achieve this national recognition. Demand-
ing reform, but with a balance of power, it has chosen to position itself explicitly within the
area of the reformist left. It joined the ETUC in 1999, due to an agreement signed with the
CFDT that gave it one of the latter’s two seats on the Executive Committee of the European
confederation.

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5. Although they were strengthened by the arrival of new members, particularly from transport and education, during
the major social mobilisations of 1995 and 2003. For these trade unions, see Connolly (2010).
6. This agreement was essential due to UNSA’s non-representativeness at national level.
3. The French trade unions and European integration

3.1. Hostility of the CGT

This diversity of trade unions has resulted in a political kaleidoscope that is evident in the position of each organisation on European integration. In the early years, the CGT was the only trade union strongly opposed to the unification process. The ECSC in particular was perceived as the implementation of a ‘German’ plan in favour of employers in the iron and steel industry (Schirmann 2013: 4) and against the Soviet Union. The common market, described as ‘the economic component of the imperialist alliance that is NATO’ – as Benoît Frachon put it during the WFTU congress in East Berlin in 1962 – was denounced as ‘the arena for the creation of monopolies’ (Pernot 2001b: 156). However, the desire not to be left out after the signing of the Treaty of Rome, combined with pressure from the Soviet Union, forced the CGT to adopt a more pragmatic attitude and accept the proposal of CGIL (Italian General Confederation of Labour) to create a standing committee in Brussels in 1965. The aim was to obtain recognition from the European institutions and beset the continental stage.7 Having obtained the right of representation in 1968, which allowed it to become a member of the European Economic and Social Committee and subsequently of the European Commission committees, the CGT has gradually got used to the European institutions. Its involvement in the Franco-Italian bureau has therefore forced it to recognise what it previously disputed: the irreversibility of European integration. However, it refused to encourage a process that could sideline the Soviet world and in its view, as it took shape, Europe seemed to be primarily a weapon aimed at the countries offering ‘real socialism’.

The CGT has made multiple criticisms of European integration. It denounced the enlargement of the EEC to the countries of the Iberian peninsula, which allegedly threatened national production and jeopardised the jobs of French workers:8

The CGT opposes any integration that could lead to the abandonment of national sovereignty, as also any enlargement that could accentuate economic and social inequalities, reinforce the power of monopolistic interests and worsen difficulties in the industrial and agricultural sectors and in those regions most sensitive to the crisis.

In the early 1980s the CGT attempted to offer a different approach in Europe that would defend class trade unionism by establishing a ‘forum for social dialogue in western Europe’ with the communist organisations from southern Europe, which had also remained outside the ETUC (CGTP, ESSAK) (Bressol 2006: 131). However, this was mainly an informal structure, without any real capacity for action. At the end of this period, the CGT was highly critical of the Maastricht Treaty because it used ‘Community policies to assist the major multinational groups’, resulting in a ‘Europe of 15 million unemployed … job insecurity, poverty and social exclusion’.9

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7. For the history of the CGT-CGIL standing committee, see Pernot (2001a: 331-337).
3.2. CFDT and FO: crossed paths

Unlike the CGT, the CFDT and FO have adopted a much more positive attitude towards European integration, close to that of the socialists, albeit with a number of differences. FO has made acceptance of the European idea a central element of its identity, which has resulted in the omnipresent call for the creation of a ‘United States of Europe’ that has been repeated at every confederal congress since 1950. In December 1968, Camille Mourgues, who was responsible for international affairs, clarified what the confederation understood by this slogan, during a forum denouncing the recognition of the communist organisations (CGT and CGIL) by the European institutions (Mourgues 1968).

Participating in European integration is not solely about the desire to improve the living conditions of workers in the context of progress. It is also, and in particular, about wanting to build a Europe that is economically, socially and politically integrated, a Europe open to other democratic countries, a Europe that is ‘supranational’ in nature. In essence it is about wanting a ‘United States of Europe’ that can guarantee freedom and peace.

Just as FO supported the creation of the ECSC, it backs the process of European integration. It is following in the footsteps of the ICFTU and its defence of the ‘free world’, given that in its early years it was materially and financially supported by the US trade unions and then by the international confederation. It committed itself to Europe insofar as this appeared to be capable of opposing the communist bloc, whose regimes were regarded as totalitarian and a threat to individual freedoms. That is why it also supported the enlargement of the common market to the United Kingdom.

FO also promotes the creation of a federal Europe, strong enough to impose a social organisation and European collective agreements. It is committed itself to reducing working time at European level when the issue arose on the ETUC agenda. Likewise, FO defends a policy of coordinated recovery, based on an action programme involving public investment in research and facilities and developing the Welfare State. However, when the crisis worsened, it refused to accept that the response should include reducing labour legislation and losing social entitlements (Mourgues 1985). As a result, although the signing of the Single European Act, despite its shortcomings, was presented as real progress towards an integrated Europe, the Maastricht Treaty was not received enthusiastically. When the French Presidency decided to hold a referendum on its adoption, FO officially refused to advise its members on how to vote, by invoking trade union independence, and repeated its call for a social Europe, adopted at its previous congress, which gave the Maastricht negotiations a mixed review, leaving activists to draw their own conclusions.

The CFDT, on the other hand, fully committed itself to the success of this referendum and its ratification, as a symbol of its defence of European integration. Since the post-war period, the confederation has supported European integration, in which it sees the possibility of building a unique economic and political space. However, it is not satisfied with a ‘business Europe’, dominated by economic and financial interests, a Europe

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10. For further information on this subject, see Régin (2004: 47-52 and 108-109).
that aims only to form a large market, far removed from the original intentions. The confederation therefore promotes the creation of a supranational political authority that is politically controlled’, which will ensure ‘the social promotion of workers, who are too often neglected’. This means ensuring coordination between European trade unions. Its confederal bureau called for this in 1965, given the prospect of the common market being achieved by 1967.\footnote{Statement by the confederal bureau, \textit{Marché commun. La CFDT demande au gouvernement français de reprendre les discussions le plus rapidement possible}, July 1965, contained in CFDT document, \textit{Positions sur les problèmes européens} (1950–1965), July 1965, CFDT confederal archives (AC) 8H1844.} As the crisis deepened, the confederation increasingly advocated a coordinated response at European level. Europe became the priority forum in which all economic and social policies should be developed. The CFDT committed to the ETUC for this reason, arguing that the latter should not simply set common goals, but should organise coherent action for employment, by awareness-raising among workers, organising a European-wide press conference, publishing joint leaflets and together canvassing governments.\footnote{‘Le congrès de la CES’, \textit{Syndicalisme CFDT}, 29 April 1976, pp. 17–18, and letter from R. Salanne to M. Hinterscheid, 24 November 1976, IISH No. 1218.} At the time, the CFDT still advocated a socialist approach, which was the only one that could guide the construction of a genuine European community, but the European forum had become inescapable:\footnote{Resolution on international policy at the 38th confederal congress of the CFDT, \textit{Syndicalisme Hebdo}, 17 May 1979, pp. 35–39.}

as the situation currently stands in terms of the development of trade and standardisation of living and working conditions in western Europe, any advance made in one country, without parallel advances being made in the other countries, can quickly become fragile and limited.

At the same time as it refocused its approach and softened the reference to socialism, the CFDT made Europe the ‘target of its hopes’, placing the strengthening of Europe at the heart of its concerns, regardless of the political direction that it might take. It should be noted that, at the same time, Jacques Delors, who for a time had been responsible for the confederation’s research office (the BRAEC) at the end of the 1950s, became head of the European Commission. His advisers included a former confederal secretary, employed until 1988 in the Economic and Job Action sector, Patrick Venturini. The CFDT therefore supported his plan for economic recovery by completing the internal market, announced in 1984, and by promoting negotiation. Europe was the only rational economic forum that allowed recourse to negotiation without depending on the state and that also guaranteed that public freedoms would be maintained. The CFDT became an advocate of an integrated Europe that would take precedence over the states. It was not satisfied with a liberal Europe, but considered that the only way of ensuring the social dimension was to achieve ‘more Europe’ (Pernot 2001a: 572–583).

Every step forward in this respect was therefore perceived as undeniable progress. As a result, the Maastricht summit in December 1991 was welcomed in a statement by the Executive Committee entitled ‘Enfin le social dans le train de l’Europe’ or ‘Finally the social side to the European train’. This was accompanied by an editorial by the CFDT’s Secretary General, Jean Kaspar, reiterating an ETUC statement highlighting the ‘success of Social Europe’ (Kaspar 1991). Paradoxically, the confederation claimed that it would not advise members on how
to vote, but came out in favour of ratifying the Treaty, which ‘paved the way’ for ‘mechanisms for action and intervention with the Community bodies, Member States and social actors’.15

3.3. Debate on the TCE that revealed French ambivalences

The differences of opinion between the French unions emerged once again during the debates on the adoption of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE). One month after Spain, the French government submitted the text to a referendum in May 2005. As with the Maastricht Treaty, the FO confederation, asserting its trade union independence, refused to formally advise on how to vote, but stated that it simply wanted to inform workers. However, its presentation of the Treaty was fairly explicit. The resolution adopted by the confederal committee stated that the Treaty ‘set in stone’ the Stability and Growth Pact and institutionalised a ‘single restrictive economic logic that was harmful to social rights’. The Stability and Growth Pact was the focus of its criticisms for several months and had previously been the subject of a number of accusatory press releases. As an accompaniment to the text, the confederation published a detailed analysis of the Treaty, and in particular conducted a highly critical press campaign, frequently highlighting, with an eye to the vote, all the ‘damaging effects’ of European decisions.16 This approach was in line with that adopted by the union for a number of years. It increased its criticism of a European integration that would cause the state to crumble, threaten workers’ rights and ultimately prevent the development of socialism. FO therefore rejected the European ideal, refusing to accept everything in its name and saying that continuity must be respected. This reorientation of its views began in the early 1990s when Marc Blondel became Secretary General of the organisation, ahead of the heir apparent promoted by his predecessor, and deliberately adopted a more attacking tone (Pernot 2001b: 161). He clearly demonstrated this in an editorial published at the time of the 1999 European elections.17

For several years we have been saying in Force Ouvrière that European integration demands a genuine debate on: Why Europe? On what bases? Under what terms? What are the purposes? ... They are now trying to say to us that this debate is no longer relevant, that decisions have been made (including on the euro) and that the important issue is: how should European integration continue in the future? In a way this once again avoids any debate on the fundamental issue.

The European Employment Pact, which was particularly called into question, became the focus of FO’s criticisms because its negotiation did not allow for a debate on the ‘economic and monetary bases of European integration’, which would result in the ‘continued submission of social and employment issues to the diktats imposed by financial market participants’. Subsequently, the defence of public services and, more specifically, the Bolkenstein

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16. For example, we can refer to an article published in FO Hebdomadaire on 16 February 2005: ‘Le social à la sauce bruxelloise : un nouvel « agenda » pour favoriser la concurrence sans, paraît-il, sacrifier les droits des salariés’, p. 19. The following week, an article discussed the working week in the Netherlands, which could be up to 55 hours: ‘Pour être plus en harmonie avec les directives de Bruxelles’. See also the dossier ‘L’Europe en question’, published in FOH, No 2705, 6 April 2005, which published the press release of the confederal committee of 30–31 March 2005.
Directive – against which it gave many warnings – caught its attention, with FO acting together with the Belgian unions to prevent its adoption, in anticipation of the position of the ETUC and other, more timorous French unions. According to FO, this threat to public services, this possibility of ‘widespread social dumping’, was an example of Market Europe at work, which was at the heart of its criticisms. This distrust of Europe was expressed even with regard to EU enlargement. Without rejecting the principle of opening up the Union, which marked the victory of democracies over the former communist regimes, FO was the only organisation in France to openly express its fears about the risks of the social and wage dumping that would be suffered by workers in western Europe as a result of the ‘inadequate social standardisation’ required of new entrants.

The CFDT took the opposite position as it had participated in the preparation of the text and in the debates on the future of Europe, and published a document entitled ‘L’Europe que nous voulons’ (‘The Europe that we want’). One of its former international sector officials, Roger Briesch, was even a member of the Convention responsible for drafting the Treaty within the EESC (Dague 2011:67-68). Having come out in favour of the Treaty very early on, its investment in the information campaign intensified as the debates gathered momentum in France, with the CFDT taking care to highlight the ETUC position, getting its General Secretary, John Monks, to speak during its meeting in support of the Treaty and using the following slogan: ‘avec la CES, la CFDT soutient les avancées sociales du traité’ (‘together with the ETUC, the CFDT supports the social advances of the Treaty’).

Between FO and the CFDT, both of which wanted to build a social Europe but had opposing views of the TCE in this respect, the hesitations of the CGT in themselves illustrated the ambivalences of the French left towards Europe and the borderline between what might appear to be an advance and what seemed to be an obstacle to the implementation of social rights. When the Treaty was assessed by the ETUC Executive Committee in October 2004, the CGT decided to abstain, officially to allow its members time to inform themselves before adopting their positions. However, those positions diverged even at the top of the CGT. Joël Decaillon co-signed an opinion in Le Monde stressing the importance of signing up to the Union’s Charter of Fundamental Rights (Decaillon and Rautureau 2004). However, the CGT’s leaders as a whole did not want to give any voting instructions, aware that many activists, having absorbed the debates conducted in parallel in the parties of the left, favoured an attitude of firm opposition, and also so that it would not be sidelined once again in the ETUC, in which the vast majority of members had adopted the draft Treaty.

As a result, the report published by the executive committee was very careful. It asserted that the Treaty confirmed the liberalism for which the CGT was striving and ‘that there are some strong elements that are extremely negative’, but also ‘elements that the trade union movement will be able to adopt’. Disowning their leadership, the members of the national confederal committee adopted a ‘contribution of the CGT to the public debate on the European challenges and particularly the draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe’, which called for mass rejection in the referendum by arguing that Europe should not proceed to the establishment of a European Constitution.

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18. See, in particular, the press release published by FO on 4 June 2004, Europe : danger de libéralisation pour l’ensemble des services.
be ‘a powerful means of regulation and reorientation of globalisation’. The leadership, which in essence agreed with this opposition, only managed to get itself out of this tangle by calling for Europe to ‘change course’.

4. The French trade unions and the ETUC

4.1. The ETUC’s early years

Due to its membership of the European Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ECFTU), FO was the only French trade union present at the creation of the ETUC in February 1973. It was quickly joined by the CFDT, although it did not approve this membership as it opposed any enlargement beyond the founding members affiliated to the ICFTU, therefore rejecting both members of the WCL – the former international confederation of Christian trade unions, which had for some time wanted to participate in the creation of the European confederation – and communist unions. The secular FO in fact viewed the Christian origins of the former with some suspicion, denying them any legitimacy within the workers’ movement and reproaching them for their closeness to the latter (Pernot 2001a: 453–454). It also feared that the WCL organisations would create, in the words of André Bergeron at the time, ‘real fractions’ that might be joined by Christian activists who were members of unified organisations such as the DGB (German Trade Union Confederation) or CISL (Italian Trade Union Confederation).

FO defended the idea that a European organisation was necessary to give the workers’ movement the means to exist vis-à-vis the Community institutions, but advocated a limited organisation integrated within international ‘free’ trade unionism and rejecting regional autonomy. Its Secretary General, André Bergeron, even proposed, during the ICFTU congress in July 1972 in London, that a predefined and institutional role for the international organisation should be recognised within the European organisation, as a way of protecting against any possibility of enlargement. Likewise, he refused to allow the European confederation to take over ‘general policy’, out of fear of creating a ‘state within a state’, which would encroach upon the action of the international confederation from which it was born, even saying that he regarded ‘the European organisation as a subdivision of the ICFTU’. Although FO had to resign itself to allowing the WCL organisations and then the CGIL to enter the ETUC, it never changed its position, even after the fact when the decisions had already been made. FO therefore made itself the ‘guardian’ of the spirit of the

21. The executive committee report written by Francine Blanche on the European challenges and the text adopted by the national confederal committee were published in Le Peuple, No. 1607, 16 February 2005. The latter received 81 votes for, 18 against and 17 abstentions.

22. In France, the CFDT had signed a unity of action agreement with the CGT in 1966 and then again in 1970, and these two organisations had carried out common industrial action. At international level, the WCL had taken part in the Dubrovnik meeting in February 1972, together with the WFTU and non-aligned organisations, with the aim of preparing for the ILO conference independently of the ICFTU.


European organisation, as shown by the opinion published by the FO Secretary General during preparations for the Munich congress, in which he beseeched the ETUC ‘not to lose its soul’. Bergeron felt that the ETUC, by agreeing to open up to the French CGT through favouring ‘unity of numbers’ to the detriment of unity ‘of hearts and minds’, could ‘neutralise and break up the international free trade union movement’.25

For the CFDT, the ETUC was primarily an instrument of renewal of global trade unionism. As a member of the WCL, it was able to join the European confederation only a year after its creation, in March 1974. However, it had done much towards the organisation’s creation. At a time when it was trying to extract itself from the Christian sphere and expand its relations beyond the WCL, Europe offered the possibility of promoting a whole new international trade unionism, more powerful and independent in comparison with the main trade union confederations.26 As a result, in 1969 its international sector official, René Salanne, took part in the informal meetings of the ‘Perraudin’ group, together with Belgian, Italian and German trade union officials and also officials from Brussels, to discuss rapprochement between the ECFTU and the European Organisation of the WCL (EO-WCL). The CFDT very closely followed the stages of its implementation, acting within the WCL to prevent a European regional grouping from remaining within that organisation. It backed up its action within the EO-WCL with strong statements: for example, in May 1972 its national committee, the ‘parliamentary’ organ of the union, launched an appeal ‘for a unitary European trade union structure’.27 Although the text referred to the possible agreement between members of the ICFTU and the WCL, it did not hesitate to extend this grouping ‘to all representative organisations in the democratic countries of Europe that freely agree to contribute independently and responsibly to the formation of a new European trade union force’, a position that the confederation maintained until the 1990s, including in favour of the CGT. It was therefore hugely disappointed when, following debates within the ICFTU, it was decided to refuse a merger with the EO-WCL and to delay the entry of its organisations. In the report on the ETUC founding congress in the trade union press, René Salanne denounced the ‘old divisions’ that were preventing the formation of a force ‘capable of defending workers at the various levels at which fundamental decisions are increasingly being taken’.28 The CFDT’s leaders were not, however, discouraged and entrusted René Salanne with the task of writing to his contacts within the trade unions, who he knew were in favour of opening up the ETUC, to discuss the conditions for individual affiliation, such as Bruno Storti, Secretary General of the ICFTU, and also Hargraves, who was responsible for international affairs within the TUC, and Urs Hauser, who was a member of the international department of the LO (Swedish Trade Union Confederation).29

During the creation of the ETUC, the CGT, which favoured a continental alliance that also took in the Soviet sphere, remained on the sidelines. However, it could not deny the reality of this new entity, which brought together all the ICFTU organisations and was preparing to open up to the EO-WCL organisations. In its first official reaction to the birth of

the ETUC, it therefore regarded the creation of the confederation as ‘positive’ and welcomed the prevailing ‘unitary’ spirit, while pointing out that the new structure was still a long way from being the unified movement that it said it wanted to become.\(^\text{30}\) The CGT said that it was in favour of a grouping of trade unions within a permanent body in Europe, which should be open ‘to all trade unions in western Europe without distinction in terms of national or international affiliation’, thereby respecting the sovereignty and freedom of orientation of its members. The CGT was not therefore uninterested in the ETUC. While not risking an official application for membership – not being certain of the outcome – it indicated in a letter to the European leaders favourable to its affiliation that it was interested in the new confederation. It said that it ‘was keen to be affiliated to the ETUC’, but that this membership should occur under ‘normal conditions’; that is, according to the same rules observed by the EO-WCL organisations.\(^\text{31}\) The CGT particularly demanded, as an initial condition of its entry, that it should be guaranteed the possibility of remaining within the WFTU. It also wanted ‘the ETUC’s programme to be acceptable to all’. Its position therefore became clearer: it was not in favour of a strictly western organisation but, given the CGT’s position within the trade union movement and so that the ETUC could be a real instrument for defending workers, it could not sideline itself. However, affiliation could not be at any price, particularly that of abandoning the WFTU. Unlike the CGIL, it has therefore kept its main contacts in the WFTU and represents the latter’s principal values, with the defence of socialism and the USSR being at the top of the list (Régin 2006).

Faced with this position, the ETUC, at Germany’s instigation, took a very cautious approach. When the CGT requested an interview with President Vetter to discuss membership terms, it took several debates within the Executive Committee, and then within the Finance and General Management Committee, for a meeting with a CGT delegation to be agreed. It was stipulated, however, that this could not be about ‘negotiations prior’ to membership; most organisations refrained from giving an opinion on possible membership.\(^\text{32}\) Contacts were made between the CGT and the ETUC, without being publicised, before an official meeting between delegations one year later; this long delay demonstrated the multiple precautions taken by the committee given the objections raised within the ETUC to the CGT’s proposed entry.\(^\text{33}\) In addition, the CGT had to give certain guarantees to the European organisation about its proposed attitude: it not only had to accept the ETUC’s articles of association and the broad lines of its action programme, and give assurances that it would not do anything if it profoundly disagreed with a decision adopted by a majority in the ETUC, but it also had to agree to prioritise the interests of workers in western Europe over those in eastern Europe, even when these were being defended by the WFTU.\(^\text{34}\)

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\(^{30}\) Déclaration de la CGT sur la CES, 21 February 1973, IHS 59CFD37.


\(^{32}\) Letter from G. Seguy to H.-O. Vetter, 23 August 1974, IHS 59CFD37. Minutes of the ETUC Executive Committee, 6 February 1975, AC 8H1929. Letter from T. Rasshaert to G. Séguy, 10 February 1975, IHS 59CFD37. At that stage, only the CFDT had indicated its agreement and FO its refusal.

\(^{33}\) The IHS has kept handwritten notes on the meeting in November 1975 (59CFD37). The CGT also published a press release: Le secrétariat européen de la CGT à Bruxelles. According to the report of the US Mission to the European Community in Brussels, sent to the Secretary of State in Washington, dated November 1975 and signed Morris, the ETUC Secretariat had clearly sought to avoid this meeting so as not to cause a crisis within the DGB. US Department of State Archives, document No 1975ECBRU09923.

\(^{34}\) ETUC document submitted to the Executive Committee on 9–10 December 1976, Compte-rendu de la réunion entre une délégation de la CGT et une délégation de la CES (Bruxelles, 5 novembre 1976), 9 November 1976, IHS 59CFD31.
During this procrastination, the CGT applied itself to showing that its concept of trade union action in Europe was not so far removed from that of the ETUC. It therefore published a press release following the ETUC congress in London in May 1976 to underline the similarity of their analyses of the job situation. It also offered its services on several occasions when the ETUC organised action days; for example, during the joint demonstration for jobs in October 1975. These initiatives were intended in particular to show that the ETUC could not do without the CGT’s mobilising force if it wanted to be a real instrument of action. In April 1978, the CGT again wanted to seize the opportunity to show its strength, but it was not content with simply asking to join the European initiative. It wanted bilateral discussions to take place in order to reach agreement on the terms for its participation in the European action day. It also invited the Spanish CCOO, which was also in discussions on its membership and suffering from the same indecision, to ask for the same, arguing that ‘if it ... seems that the CGT’s participation could assist the action in France and consequently its success and the interests of workers in Europe, then it ... seems clear that the same argument can be objectively made for [Spain]’. This type of approach could only put the ETUC in an awkward position, and unsurprisingly it refused to agree to this request. Shortly afterwards, in June 1980, the CGT’s application for membership was officially rejected on the basis of the ‘fundamental concepts of society and the role of trade unions within that society’, arguing that its political practices and international affiliation did not fit with the fundamental criteria of the ETUC.

4.2. Contrasting investments of the CFDT and FO

From the start, the CFDT’s leaders have wanted to push the ETUC to be a real instrument of action and not just a coordination agency. This is clearly apparent in the speech made by Edmond Maire in 1973: he warned that this organisation could not be ‘a waiting room of the European Economic Community where trade unionists “chat” while waiting for meagre audiences’, but rather ‘an international organisation for action where the views of workers are discussed, where unifying and mobilising platforms of demands are prepared, and where considered and coordinated initiatives go beyond nationalisms and whiffs of the Cold War’. This was also the direction of his speech at the London congress in 1976 when the resolution that he tabled was adopted as a recommendation to the Executive Committee that it clarify its action objectives.

Questions remained, however, about the CFDT’s capacity for initiative within the European confederation. Unlike FO, its Secretary General was not Vice-President of the ETUC and none of its representatives were members of the Finance and General Management Committee, whose meetings preceded and prepared for the Executive Committee sessions. The CFDT could only rely on the presence of political secretaries from its ranks – deputies to Mathias Hinterscheid and then Emilio Gabaglio – such as François Staedelin (1976–1986)

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40. ‘Le congrès de la CES’, *Syndicalisme ...*, art. cit.
and then Jean Lapeyre (1986–2003), whose appointment to the Secretariat was the result of a deliberate strategy on the part of the confederation. Although the latter did not act as representatives of the organisation, they were, in addition to being a possible relay, a source of information and an important link for understanding ‘European mysteries’. An Alsatian by origin and a former postal worker, Staedelin – at the time head of the PTT federation – was chosen for his knowledge of German, which enabled him to easily integrate within the ETUC Secretariat and facilitated relations with the DGB. Jean Lapeyre was the main person responsible for social dialogue at European level, which marked the commitment of the CFDT to the ETUC (Dague 2011:19–21 and 40–43).

For its part, FO has never sought to blend in with the European organisation. Preferring to adopt a ‘look-out’ role, it has been keen to ensure that the ETUC’s positions are in line with its own, contenting itself with occasional opposition when necessary. FO has therefore had little influence on the strategic choices of the European confederation. Its Secretary General has, however, since 1973 been a member of the Finance and General Management Committee, responsible for preparing for Executive Committee meetings, but FO has never supported this presence by developing privileged bilateral relations. In the late 1980s, FO tried to reinvigorate its European action by setting up a Europe sector within the confederal bureau and establishing a permanent delegation to Brussels. The aim was to better inform activists about, and raise their awareness of, the European challenges. It therefore made 1 May 1989 into a European Day and invited the ETUC to join its parade, copying its slogans calling for a social Europe.41 However, as its analysis of European integration has become increasingly critical, it has gradually distanced itself from the European confederation. Whereas previously FO called on the national organisations to get involved in the ETUC and abandon part of their sovereignty, it now calls for the ‘transfer of powers’ to the confederation with regard to Europe-wide negotiations specifically to occur in line with the subsidiarity principle. The ETUC should therefore negotiate only ‘on a limited basis and through a very precise mandate from the affiliated organisations’.42 At the ETUC congress in Luxembourg in 1991, the European organisation was attacked for its lack of action and its tendency to simply denounce the social deficit of European integration, without diverging from the agenda set by the Commission or national governments.43 Marc Blondel was the instigator of this approach and he made the most virulent attacks against the European confederation, particularly when he left his post as Secretary General:

It should be noted that the ETUC is not behaving like a traditional trade union trying to ensure a balance of power at European level, but more like a pressure group that is lobbying the European Commissioners.44

The FO representative was therefore repeating criticisms already made during the Prague congress, which he had in fact refused to attend as Secretary General. Since his departure

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42. ‘Europe. Les 40 organisations syndicales de la CES en congrès’, FO Hebdomadaire, 22 May 1991.
44. Compte rendu des travaux du XXe congrès confédéral FO, 2–6 February 2004 at Villepinte, opening speech by the Secretary General: ‘L’indépendance : une force pour l’avenir des salariés’ and general resolution, pp. 29 and 645. This denunciation of ‘European lobbying’ had emerged the previous year at the ETUC congress in Prague, which FO had attended in order to denounce the ETUC’s financial dependence on the European institutions.
from the confederation, FO has continued to make the same criticisms, particularly at the Seville congress, at which it submitted more amendments than most other organisations.\(^\text{45}\) FO reproaches the ETUC for going along with a liberal construction of Europe and adapting its logic in return for meagre social guarantees without any real value. This is strong criticism and, indeed, it is the only organisation that openly says this, even within the ETUC. Furthermore, FO has proved hostile to any enlargement, expressing doubts about the possibilities of extension to the East, always fearing encroachment on the terrain of the ICFTU, maintaining its opposition to the entry of the CGT – a position that it will defend to the very end – and refusing to vote on its affiliation in 1999, as for any other communist organisation. Since the 1980s, only the affiliation applications of the Spanish UGT and Portuguese UGT-P, which had previously joined the ICFTU, have received its backing. Since its creation, FO has constantly highlighted the origins of the ETUC, which came out of ‘free’ trade unionism, and has always taken care to respect the action of the ICFTU, as if the European organisation were nothing more than a delegation of power from the international confederation. In fact, during the creation of the ITUC, FO demanded that the ETUC become part of the international organisation, highlighting once again its fundamental opposition to continental independence.

The CFDT’s position is different: it can rely in particular on the support of the Belgians and Italians to make the ETUC into an effective instrument of action, but the significance of the link between its main members and the ICFTU forms the main obstacle to its ambitions with regard to the European confederation. Keen to make the ETUC into a key player in the restructuring of international trade unionism, the CFDT wants it to take its rightful place in meeting global challenges and not to hesitate in acting beyond the Community sphere, just like an international confederation. With this in mind, the CFDT publicises its key positions: for example, the text that it adopted on the exercise of freedoms in the East, when it was boiling over with dissidence, and its propaganda materials (posters, brochures and so on) were used in the fight against apartheid in South Africa, which was an action to which the ICFTU and the WCL were particularly committed.

Jacques Chérèque, who succeeded René Salanne, encouraged the ETUC Secretariat to react to the situation in Argentina and expressly called for an ETUC statement condemning the dictatorship of General Videla: in this way the ETUC could support the exiles, many of whom were in Europe, without encroaching on the prerogatives of the international organisations.\(^\text{46}\) The issue was debated during the Executive Committee session on 27–28 September 1979, but the CFDT could not convince its partners. The latter – mainly also members of the ICFTU – did not consider such action to be necessary, unlike the CFDT, which broke with the international arm in 1979. This departure further reinforced its European ambition, which it made the top priority of its international policy.

Its change of view about Europe was also evident in how it envisaged the format of the ETUC. In the name of social Europe, the CFDT called for the contractual dimension to be favoured by developing its supranationality, which meant giving more power to the Secretariat. At the 1991 congress, it supported the changes to the ETUC structures, to which it had contributed through its exchanges with the ETUC Secretariat and its participation in the ad

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\(^{45}\) See also ‘Xe congrès de la CES. Lobbying ou syndicalisme, il faut choisir’, *FO Hebdomadaire*, No. 2622, 25 June 2003, p. 15. On the Seville congress, see Dufresne and Gobin (2007).

\(^{46}\) Letters from A. Soulat (Confederal Secretary of the CFDT) to M. Hinterscheid, 9 March 1977 and 29 May 1978; letter from J. Chérèque to M. Hinterscheid, 18 September 1979, IISH No. 1218.
hac working group.\textsuperscript{47} It expressed itself satisfied with the action taken by the duo of Lapeyre and Gabaglio, and particularly with the efforts made by the latter to impose a regulation on European collective bargaining, to be conducted by the ETUC Secretariat, setting out the procedures for preparing and deciding on negotiating mandates. It wanted to go further and set an example. In 1999 it adopted a resolution in which it undertook to copy the texts adopted by the ETUC because ‘only a broader transfer of national trade union responsibilities to the ETUC will allow adequate regulations and decisions to be adopted at confederal, regional and sectoral level’, thus accepting the priority of supranationality over such decisions.\textsuperscript{48}

4.3. The significant entry of the CGT

The entry of the CGT into the ETUC opened a whole new chapter. This integration, which officially occurred in 1999, had in fact been on the cards for around 10 years. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of the USSR shook the CGT to its very core and led it to distance itself from the Communist Party and adapt its action policy (Mouriaux 2005: 34). Even Henri Krasucki, despite having advocated in the early 1980s that the CGT should re-join the camp of the East, became aware of the CGT’s isolation in Europe. He therefore launched a new call for membership of the ETUC, without, however, changing his views.\textsuperscript{49}

In a long letter, he tirelessly repeated the arguments of the CGT, which was ‘the strongest, most influential, most combative’ organisation that Europe could not ignore when the social state of the Community was of such concern and the Social Charter was useless. If the ETUC, which had been ineffective up to that point, wanted to be able to back up its investment in the negotiations with demonstrations of force, against employers who were not accepting any advance for workers, the support of the CGT was essential. Couched in these terms, however, the CGT’s request received little backing.

Louis Viannet, who succeeded Krasucki in 1992, was the one who gave the necessary impetus to the CGT’s campaign for membership of the ETUC, starting with re-establishing contact with the CGIL and FGTB (Belgian General Federation of Labour), while pursuing relations with the Spanish and Portuguese trade unions. He expressed a wish for the CGT to contribute to the European trade union movement so that, as he saw it, its course of action could be altered and its core social objectives could be established (Viannet 2006). As number two in the CGT, in charge of the cooperation sector, he had already managed to detach the Europe sector and entrust it to Joël Decaillon, a man who was well-informed on European issues, having previously taken part in the international rail workers’ seminars for over 10 years, a member of the European Joint Committee on Railways, and the confederation’s representative to the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels. He therefore became the focus of the CGT’s European contacts. Their first initiative was to organise ‘in solidarity’ a national action day on the same date that the ETUC decided to mobilise workers – 18 October 1989 – even going so far as to parade in Brussels around the European event.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{47}. Letter from R. Briesch, international sector official, to M. Hintersheid on the future of the ETUC, 9 April 1990, AC 50DIE3.
\textsuperscript{50}. See, on this subject, Decaillon (1989). Interview with Joel Decaillon, 9 February 2015, in Paris.
These two men had the good fortune to find within the ETUC another duo who were keen for the CGT to join the European confederation: Emilio Gabaglio and Peter Seideneck. The ETUC General Secretary had already offered a sympathetic ear to Krasucki’s approach, meeting with a CGT representative for Europe during a CGIL congress. The initial contacts were made discretely, but the situation came to light when Peter Seideneck took part in the CGT congress in 1995. In the meantime, the Europe sector carried out multiple initiatives to make activists aware of European issues and pursued exchanges with ETUC member organisations.

Further significant steps were taken when, a few months later, a circular from the Europe sector called on all the CGT’s organisations to participate in the action day organised by the ETUC for 29 March 1996, and when the confederation joined the European action for Vilvorde, which Renault wanted to close. The CGT joined the action, but it was the appearance of its leaders at the front of the Brussels demonstration, beside the leaders of the ETUC, the CFDT and FO, that was particularly telling. At that stage, the CGT had already broken with the WFTU, thus removing one of the obstacles to its membership of the ETUC. This break had been supported by a very large majority in the CGT, due to significant efforts made by Louis Viannet and Joël Decaillon, the latter having joined the executive committee in 1992. The organisation had also sufficiently adapted its European views so that they were closer to those of the ETUC: in 1995 it announced, by rewording its membership application, its desire to take part in the construction of a trade union ‘counter-power’ and thereby demonstrated its desire to participate in the construction of a different Europe, ‘which is for the workers, for their needs and their common interests’.

It declared this again in a statement by its executive committee on 3 May 1996, which circulated in the form of a brochure and which called for further debate on the future of European integration. In this statement, it described in particular an integrated Europe, built ‘on structures of solidarity and cooperation’, which would ensure ‘respect for and improvement of the fundamental social rights of employees’. Over the course of 20 years, the CGT therefore changed its view and seemed to agree with the other organisations on the opportunity that Europe could represent. However, the CGT’s membership of the ETUC became reality only when the CFDT finally agreed in 1998. FO remained firmly opposed but lacked the means to prevent it.

Although it was the CGT that joined the European confederation, this also resulted in the latter’s action taking on a new tone. Very quickly, the CGT encouraged, within the ETUC, the organisation of Euro-demonstrations to get the confederation working much more on the ground than through ‘a top-level European trade unionism’. As a result, one of the first initiatives of the CGT’s leaders, once in the ETUC, was to make contact with the Portuguese trade unions to encourage the organisation of demonstrations during the European Council summit in Lisbon in March 2000, and thus instigate a broad mobilisation effort with a view to the Nice summit under the French Presidency. The CGT therefore made use of the good integration of its leader since 1999, Bernard Thibault, who had figured in the 1995 social

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52. Letter from L. Viannet to E. Gabaglio, 14 March 1995, IHS 59CFD31. See also Compte rendu in extenso des débats du 45e congrès confédéral de la CGT, 3–8 December 1995, Montreuil, p. 93.
movement. He offered a view that was primarily ‘French’, aware that the capacity to make themselves heard within an extended organisation would come primarily from the absence of disagreements at national level. (His European investment would later result in his election to the ETUC Executive Committee in 2007.) The CGT also agreed with the line taken by the new British General Secretary, John Monks. Joël Decaillon therefore naturally found his place within the Secretariat when he succeeded Jean Lapeyre as the ‘French’ member from 2003, a sign of the rapid integration of an organisation long banned in Europe and of the value given to its contribution.

The CGT is therefore at ease in an ETUC that has become more combative; for example, denouncing ‘casino capitalism’. Conversely, the CFDT, having robustly defended European social dialogue, has found itself isolated. It still defends the idea of Europe as a necessary space, but its views have become less audible in an ETUC that no longer wants Europe to be built at any price. Isolated, its only real choice has been to get together with the CGT in order to try to offer a French voice on the European scene. It is this capacity to work together – developed during preparations for the most recent ETUC congresses, particularly in Seville and then Athens, when the French organisations tabled joint amendments – on which the future place of the French organisations in the European confederation will depend.55

5. Conclusion

Whereas, at the start of the 2000s, the European idea seemed to be stronger than ever, the referendum on the European Constitution dented this optimism, revealing significant disagreements between the trade unions, even if none of them called into question the principle of European integration. In this respect, there has been convergence between the French organisations. It should be said that the system of social regulation in France, given the limited place afforded to the trade unions, does not form an obstacle to Europeanisation: the trade unions do not have to fear the extension of debates to the supranational level because their power does not in any way enable them to assert themselves at the national level (Pernot 2010: 318–320). As a result, no organisation opposes the construction of a social Europe, but behind the slogan the strategies to achieve this differ greatly, just like the challenges posed. These differences therefore make it difficult to interpret the attitude of French trade unionism towards Europe.

In 40 years, the main French organisations have changed a great deal and their positions have reversed. In 1973 FO seemed to be the most ‘pro-European’ organisation, but in a Europe conceived as an anti-communist bastion and with an ETUC representing ‘free’ forces. From the moment that the ETUC began to expand, firstly by opening up to Christian organisations and then eventually to communist organisations, FO has kept distancing itself. It is now the confederation that is most critical of both the acquis communautaire and the ETUC, even though such a departure could never have been imagined. The CGT, the organisation that was initially most critical of the very idea of Europe, following in the footsteps of a communist movement that was highly mistrustful of a process coming from the West, has for its part reversed course to become, in the past decade, an organisation to be reckoned with in Brussels. As for the CFDT, it has gradually made European integration into its action

55 On the French participation in the Seville and Athens congresses, see, respectively, Dufresne and Gobin (2007) and Rehfeld (2011).
horizon. However, what was valid when the trade union structure supported European integration has become more difficult to sustain when the ETUC has adopted a more critical tone towards this. That is why its European commitment is now less publicised.

Beyond these divergences, has Europe played a role in the aspiration for unity of the French trade unions? In the name of European interests, internal tensions have been held in check, as shown by the CFDT’s constant support for the CGT’s membership of the ETUC up to 1980. Many activists have noticed the improved relations since it has become commonplace to attend branch meetings and the working habits to which this has lent itself. European meetings have, however, formed the main occasion to express disagreements between organisations, with the view of Europe reflecting their political differences. However, a change has perhaps occurred since the 2000s. This change seems to be linked, firstly, to the path of these organisations: they feel more strongly the need to have a European instrument capable of organising transnational action, by promoting supranational negotiation when necessary. Secondly, the personalities of the trade union leaders have certainly played a part. Awareness of the need for a French voice has developed across the board. Only the future, and the development of Europe itself, will tell whether this becomes an underlying logic or whether, with the change in leaders, the good personal understanding will belong to the past.

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56. As demonstrated by the words of J. Decaillon, reported by L. de Comarmond (1999).
Europe and the divisions of French trade unionism


National trade unions and the ETUC: A history of unity and diversity  65
Claude Roccati


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