

CGT – General Confederation of Labour

Orientation Document for the 51st Confederal Congress

1. Preamble

2. After 120 years of existence, we, the CGT, as well as other trade unions, have come to a point where we must question our future. We must question our relationship with employees.
3. The orientation document contains five topics to answer these questions: union approach, construction of union fights, relationships with other unions, European and world unionism, and democracy with the CGT.
4. The backbone of the orientation document is the scheme of field visits to members and activists in their union branch, closest to the workplaces. 2 000 branches were visited before the 1. version, the framework of an exceptional preparation and approach.
5. Because the CGT Confederal Congress is none else than the congress of CGT unions. Discussions are theirs, and they own the process of collectively defining the orientations to implement.
6. The 51st congress has 5 items that we wish to submit to our members' discussion; they are fully in line with the concerns heard in the unions; strategy of fights, gathered unionism, internal democracy, our vision of union life, the role of youth, women, engineers, the stakes of unionisation... have been recurrent issues heard from members. Work and the suffering it generates, was systematically pointed at.
7. To match this exceptional preparation, we chose an innovative document format, so that every CGT man and woman can claim it his and her own, as well as the future actions it lays out. If the document is examined by outside stakeholders, in any case union members have to be willing to own it, so the orientations can be implemented.
8. Its format and size must make it readable for the greatest numbers of members. Easier reading is by no mean the sign of a lack of contents: our ambitions for social alternatives are strong and loud claims against the austerity policies dragging France and Europe down.
9. We are certainly not short of ambitious union claims, though we chose not to thoroughly develop them here. Indeed we are the carriers of powerful claims. CGT does have strong and innovative propositions for the industry, for its sustenance, modernisation, development; for example reshoring, relocating activities back in France will not only meet the population's basic needs, it will fight against a nonsensical circulation of goods across the whole planet, with the all too well-known impact on the environment. We support public services as they are the main fabric of

our living-together in solidarity; it is the stuff that makes our republican contract, woven from social needs to be met, space to be planned and countries to be developed. As postulate in our view of the economy and its finance, well it is time it starts serving social progress and not its own financialisation. We develop the principle in which work, work only and the wealth it generates, must finance social protection. Strongly claiming the access to different rights to education, training, job qualification, information, communication, transport, sports, leisure, culture, we know they are as many drivers of the workers' empowerment well beyond, and outside, the workplace.

10. Our « Cost of capital » campaign, in favour of working time reduction, salary increase and qualifications acknowledgment, proves that we're in no retreat from the battle of ideas and its confrontations, instead we are a force, bringing forth propositions. The open discussion on *individual occupational accounts* or CPAs shows that CGT is indisputably modern in its claims and ideas about new employed work statuses and occupational social security, which we proposed more than fifteen years ago.
11. We keep reasserting our ambitious union claims, day after day in our endeavour, opposing employers' choices and State policies, bringing forward alternative propositions to be discussed, actions to be fought, and mobilisation to be flared up.
12. On November 17th and 18th 2015, the National Confederal Committee or CCN approved the union goals and their continuous update, to be better articulated and complementary with our orientations. This forms a wholesome, coherent structuring for our activity.
13. Orientation documents do not cancel the previous one unless by written decision. It is a recount of the transformations implemented, i.e. those brought by the digital revolution, and a highlight of their significance. So doing it also contributes fuelling our claim endeavour. The 51st congress orientation document is an extension of our will to anchor and organise our course of activity around work. Our ambition of social transformation sourced from real situations at work, must take into account the evolutions of the working world; its demands for democracy; its need for solidarity in the fights and new modes of action, to reinvent with the workers themselves. More than ever let their voices be heard as they grow stronger together, gain more rights and achieve social progress in France and worldwide.
14. With its new salaried status project and its demand for social democracy, CGT brings forward a project of transformation of the employed condition attuned to a sustainable human development.
15. The meaning of work is changing, and at the same time, capitalism pursues the same goals with a dramatic financialisation of the economy. Customs and mores may have changed. Sadly, man-by-man exploitation remains.
16. Globalisation and liberal ideology are deconstructing salaried employment. It is well under way already, and a challenge for trade unions, more familiar with integrated workers. Today trade unions must deal with precarious workers, youth, and even a type of salaried work in

disguise: self traders. The working world is being taken to pieces. Dealing with the fragments of splintering salaried work is a high stake for today's CGT.

17. In an environment fostering social fragmentation, the CGT must play a decisive role and develop solidarity for social progress.
18. Our union project is robustly set up. But no matter how relevant our responses to improve social, economic and environmental situations, they'll be to no avail if we fail to make them considered. What use would they be for the workers?
19. We are facing one central and crucial challenge: the efficacy of unionism, of CGT. And following on of course, what accessibility of the union as a tool? In other words: a union closest to the employees; a confederation providing for its members; serving them more, and better.
20. Such is our challenge of the times. The discussion must take place in union branches if our collective propositions are to come to life, and be given substance, to gain the dual benefits of improving workers' conditions in one way, and social transformation as a feedback. It is crucial to reassert our view of unionism as a members' movement primarily focused on employees, facing the State, employers' and sometimes, other unions' will to professionalise unionism.
21. « Over-institutionalisation and « de-politicisation » may turn out to be pitfalls, barriers for the efficacy of unionism. We don't mean to retreat from all the levels and places of dialogue and social democracy; but we mean to keep firm ties with our course of union action, with members and with employees. In turn we don't mean to revive bonds between trade unions and a political party as once existed; but to lay unionism back on the tracks of a societal project. Thinking the life of the city used to be the CGT's strength; let us make it a reality again. That is all the meaning of reconnecting with the culture of political debate.
22. Certainly, attacks happen everywhere in Europe and the world. This makes it harder for trade unions to accomplish their mission. However, the stakes are: to contest austerity policies and offer alternative ones, to lead the discussion, to show they are possible. Also, European priorities need to be reversed so that the monetary and budgetary triple A of Europe becomes a triple A for a high-class, solidarity-based and protective social model. This means making sure that workers' and peoples' expectations and claims are heard, allowing true visibility to the alternatives out of the crisis, i.e. working time, salaries, the position in Europe of industry and public services...
23. In the current worldwide context impacting the populations, the CGT struggles for the best offer for all, for disarmament and a peaceful world, for a planet-wide social progress. This is why the scope of actions we are undertaking is not only national, but European and international.
24. The CGT is the subject of criticism, publicised by some press, because even if our DNA value is to work for a rallied, coalesced unionism ever careful to seek unity in union action, we do

not want to melt into “unionism as one big mould” for everyone to conform. The following resolutions aim at making the CGT an inescapable player in the country’ union landscape; to grow ever stronger with more and more, better and better trained, members; all this to slam our propositions in the middle of negotiation tables, to keep pushing our union claims by sustaining a durable balance of power, a test-of-strength relationship to meet the high stakes.

25... Topic n° 1: « Our union approach and how we relate with the workers »

26. The CGT has 120 years of history; 120 years of social gains conquered because it was in touch with the workers. A conquest made from the workers’ needs, building propositions, demanding, fighting for them and creating a balance of power before bargain. This is confrontational unionism, contesting, proposing, taking action, and negotiating.

27. Some historical milestones

28. The CGT was born in 1895, from wilful employees resolved to collectively organise and confront employers.

29. In 1902, the Montpellier congress promoted a federalism-based unionism: the CGT was organising both according to workers’ «professional dimensions and geographic areas».

30. In 1906, the Amiens Charter confirms its specific trait, i.e. to fight the daily struggle for immediate progress on the workplace, companies and administrations, constantly mindful of our transformational views for society. This was, and still is our definition of the double chore, a unionism without « small » and « big » collective claims to be prioritised, a unionism that fixes broken windows whilst coherently acting for social transformation.

31. A union alliance binding immediate progress and social transformation

32. Hard as the media or the dominant thinking try to avoid the subject or deny it: the class confrontation of work against capital is more than ever at play right now. It is the marker of every law from a government which lends a friendly ear to the Medef employers’ organisation; and it means the cost of capital is increasingly burdensome and siphoning larger and larger portions of the wealth produced by workers. And yet, under the ideological pressure of employers and the governments which support them, every attempt is made to erase the class struggle from the minds of workers and union members. For example, the management will impose the agenda and schedule of negotiations, ruling as if for the common good of the company. Or else, the management will boldly present to employees some integration tools designed for its own benefit, and make them look like social progress (employees’ incentive schemes and share holding...). This institutional activity is supported by elected and commissioned representatives who have a prevailing role.

33. Employers want to force a delegated unionism. Unions often complain they are «overwhelmed» by the meetings of their company, local authority or administration, and state how little time is left for regular meetings with union members and employees to

discuss their concerns. Sometimes the information goes straight from the managing office or from the employees' representation entities, to the workers, without any previous communication to or involvement of union members.

34. A unionism whose company-level bargaining takes into account the bigger picture of European territories

35. European reforms and national reforms are two complementary mechanisms creating for our country a new social and political environment driven by European institutions. In those regions, new spaces are being built on economic, social, political and industrial foundations mainly laid by specialising entire zones to serve corporate competitiveness on one hand, and the dictate of finance and the globalised market on the other.
36. Those regions are no more shaped by citizens, and their basic needs; spatial planning is now ruled by businesses' motives: infrastructures, possibility for given categories of employees to reside. The inhabitants' socioeconomics is no more guidance for the public policies; now they'd rather respond to the current needs of businesses settled in the concerned area. Elected representatives are no more decision-makers in terms of urban planning to suit inhabitants' needs; they are replaced by some remote organ applying directives come straight from ministries.
37. These land use planning issues impact the working conditions of employees, the lives of the jobless, pensioners, and the population at large. CGT must help employees to acquire the resources and leverage to weigh on the meaning and contents of public policies.
38. To enforce our efficiency we must find new ways for professional unions to work with territorial organisations. With the new competences and powers for regions and metropolitan cities, local challenges and professional stakes will further intertwine across all industry branches.
39. The main questions deal with the meaning of CGT action on those spatial dimensions, the significance of the geographic region in CGT action, the gathering of union bodies around concrete projects, particularly industrial ones, in order to design and carry out demands, take in the reality of the new web of larger regions and greater cities, claim local social democracy spaces and move on to reach places where CGT can have leverage, associating the network of elected or commissioned representatives.
40. To do so, the following measures must be engaged:
41. – work to confederate the CGT activity in the regions, through the participation of the professional, branch representatives in the CGT regional committees;
42. – to rethink the CGT Regional Committees and make them bodies to impulse actions and honeycomb resources for the bargaining goals and for union life;
43. – to invite branch representatives to foster branch union activity in the regions, integrate the new territorial challenges, most of which are today crosscutting through multiple sectors, and contribute to confederalise union activity at the regional level;

44. –to consider the statutory changes for the regional committees during the CGT 52nd congress.

45. Union balance between institutional activity and proximity with members and employees

46. All this has a potential impact on employees' motivation to join the union. In such an approach where collective action takes second place, the union becomes an individual insurance and service providing advocacy for individual cases on one hand which takes a great deal of union time and resources, and steering cultural and social activities on the other, most of which are not union demands. No wonder union branches complain about members' lack of attendance to general assemblies.

47. Thinking clearly of these threats, CGT must reaffirm our conception of a members' and activists' unionism, primarily focused on employees, challenger of government, management, even other trade unions' which would institutionalise unionism and make it an expert caste, drifting as far as a professionalised unionism within hyper-centralised employees' representatives institutions.

48. We must reach the balance between institutional work and proximity to employees. We must, at all levels, including company-based, set ourselves free from the employers' or the government's agenda, we must go and negotiate to obtain progress from our union claims' set of references.

49. Priorities cannot be set unless they came from our members' chosen orientations. Organised employees, in their proximity, have easier access to their colleagues' opinions. Now to make sure that CGT's propositions align with the claims expressed by employees, our propositions must be submitted to the workers' themselves. This permanent consultation approach feeds our goals. We do not want to decide for employees what is good or bad for them.

50. To stay in touch with workers and remain within their reach, we must neither generalise nor interpret; we must foster participation, support, work with them, take them on board the bargaining, claim actions. Collective action and unionism are beneficial provided they build space and initiatives allowing everyone to speak, do, and play a role wherever company management distils fear and silence. Unionism efficiency first lies in the daily individual and collective defensive lines for workers; in our ability to build a shared edifice out the fragments of a splintered reality. Global trends in the balance of power change as soon as union action is able to involve and mobilise employees in their workplace and daily environment. This is the best place to test their own ability to reverse the course of matters, as they engage, act and weigh on decisions.

51. Training to gain efficacy

52. Union training is necessary to carry on our activity. It must be accessible to all unionised employees. Today only 10% of the newly unionised benefit it. Though the contents were reviewed and updated, we must keep up the good work and think how to offer training to these

90% missing members. Length of sessions, decentralised rooms, -additional modules tailored to union branches with the help of the CGT's local and branch organisations, wider access of the leadership training available to union branches' directions... all of these questions need answers and new rights need to be conquered. To do so, we also must meet the challenge of having union branches' leaders able to feed uninterrupted union life with the transmission of knowledge and know-how.

53. Work, at the heart of the bargaining activity

54. Already during the 49th congress, we chose to restore work, its contents, its conditions of exercise, its purpose, as a true dimension, that is, the core of everyday life.
55. During the field visits, many union branches expressed the employees' ill-being at work. A transforming work organisation, lean management as an offspring, working time increase, its intensification induced by new technologies when the right to disconnection is not respected, all this strongly impacts the workers' life at work and at home. Similarly, the triptych of « quantified targets, individualised evaluation, and merit bonuses » is harming the workers in the very meaning they give to work, and their will of a job well done.
56. Work reorganisation directly impacts employees' work (suffering, degrading working conditions, unacknowledged qualifications, productivity levels, isolation, fear, badly-done job, professional exhaustion...); also, civil servants or employees with a public service mission, have a growing difficulty to meet the users' needs.
57. Employees' representatives, Health and Safety committees' members, occupational physicians, occupational therapists, researchers, all not only question the growingly unequal sharing of wealth produced by labour, benefitting capital, but also underpin the need to transform and revalorise working conditions.
58. We should find meaning in work; working, we should be empowered. We have had enough of this work-to-be-put-up with, to be suffered. Everyday employees use tremendous energy, intelligence, knowledge and know-how to overcome this toil. Faring well at work will take us to living well *off* our work earnings. Our target is not health at work, with supposedly sick employees: we claim that work itself is sick and has to be transformed!
59. An ability to act at work also means to develop as a person, a factor of good health.
60. Experiences conducted in this approach show that from concrete workplace situations, we can engage into collective action, ranging from the transformation of work to the battle for jobs, for vocational training, for salaries, for the reduction of working time...so doing, workers weigh on the company's strategy and many employees join the CGT.
61. Even if the impacts cannot be measured immediately, this approach wins the adhesion of employees with their inexhaustible true stories about work and their readiness to fill the questionnaires used by union branches to put forward propositions. It's a novel, efficient way, rooted in the workplace.

62. For over twenty years, multinationals and large trusts have been manoeuvring with the sole aim of a highest possible income for the capital. We're facing new forms of shareholding, a globalised capitalism organised a long time ago to relocate production and outsource services by subcontracts; finding one's bearings becomes difficult; work and its organisation are changing, particularly with new information and communication technologies. Already employers have segmented the «future workforce » into regular employees, self-employed workers and collaborative work (volunteer work) through what they produce on the Web. Hyper-precarious work is a derived phenomenon: 9 workers out of 10 are on fixed-term contracts and their terms are shorter and shorter. Pitting workers against each other through competition is now commonplace. Insecurity becomes the rule and some – especially from the extreme right – openly try to breed conflict among the people.
63. There are more than one million self traders, close to 40 000 workers are hired through portage host companies, as well as a significant rise of « uberisation » forms. This situation is international. Thus in the Netherlands, for example, 30 % of employees are no more on a contract. Trade unions chose to unionise so-called freelancers who in fact remain strongly subordinate to the company they work for. The legal 'independent status' that takes people « off the payroll » and makes them ineligible to rights gained by salaried labour, is a gross masquerade attempting to conceal the total economic dependency. More than 9 self-traders out of 10 earn less than the French minimum wages (Smic). With this new form of employment, the question of a new salaried work status has to emerge in order to combat a new form of exploitation.
- 64. A union of all workers**
65. Despite the modification of work and employment, unionised workers keep a strong attachment to their union branch, as base camp, when it becomes harder and harder to feel a belonging to a work community. Today, the workforce is made of remote workplaces and many employees with different statuses, some of whom don't even belong to the company sometimes. Unions have growing difficulties to touch base with all employees within the production process, because of the base is gone; this splintered situation, plus sometimes the very structure of CGT organisations, too compartmented at times, are hurdles to develop our union and thrive.
66. Given its values and aims, CGT has to be a union for all, encompassing the wealth of professional stories and paths.
67. CGT covers only 25 % of employees, and the workforce is fragmented today. 60 % of unionised employees work in enterprises of over 500 headcount. In this light, we cannot possibly remain focused on the sole core of permanent contract / large companies. This isn't where most young people work, especially the least qualified; their gateway to employment no longer is a permanent contract, and those outsourced and third parties employees slip through the net. In the past fifty years tertiary salaried work has also increased a sector where women are especially precarious and part-time jobs are imposed.

68. One of our greatest resolves is to stick by these workers insecure-by-status, to stick by youth and by categories of precarious workers who are not easily reached other than through family or acquaintance networks with no written existence. We tend to pass them without seeing them. In some companies, temp work is at the heart of the manufacture, the second « HR », and there, we have to try much harder.
69. Unionising the youth is a high stake. They live in total disarray between what they were taught in their studies about the workplace, and the real thing. This is the consequence of the companies' strategy to avoid cohesion and common reference among workers by dividing them, outsourcing them, giving them insecure jobs and temp work.
70. The young may well cultivate their individuality but they are far from being individualists as proves their ability to mobilise for societal issues, even if this mobilisation does not always look very traditional in the eyes of union activists. Indeed experience is gold, but we must also learn to give them room, to listen to them and accept their different views and modes of action; we must be open to air new ideas and use new communication media, social networks or others. This is how the youth will recognise themselves in the CGT.
71. The proportion of engineers, managers and technicians is growing in companies. In some industries they now account for the majority of employees. Given their specific position in terms of autonomy, qualifications, social liability, even the significant impact of their work on other categories of workers, it is for us to cross a line and take them into account, however difficult it is for many trade unions to engage with this socio-professional category.
72. One of the solutions is to develop a perennial, specific activity, for CGT to be more, and better, the trade union of the whole workforce. It is a must, if we are all to understand each other, all the components of the workforce. It is a must, if we are to avoid gaps between categories of employees that will harm the workplace community.
73. The use and development of the Ugict-CGT, a CGT-specific deployment tool to regroup employees, is meant to support engineers, managers and technicians so they are not left alone with corporatist unionism that will only pit workers against each other, or with employers.
74. In France, 90 % of companies are either small or organised into small size entities, and they account for over 3, 5 million workers. Over the past years the proportion of those employed in less than twenty-headcount enterprises has been peaking up, reaching 40%, 26 of which work in very small enterprises. Reversely, the proportion of employees companies hiring more than 500 headcount went from 20 % down to 11 %. During the last elections, workers from very small enterprises chose the CGT as their leading union, meaning we rank first at the cross branch level.
75. We endeavour to take all employees into account, whether from very small businesses where we are not or hardly represented, or from large groups where we are organised to fight for their rights. For this resolve, CGT unionism must build up on the identification of

the workers' needs in very small businesses, of the craftsmen, private individual employers and sole traders. Then we'll match their needs.

76. A successful deployment in very small businesses with a right type of unionism will secure CGT representativeness.

77. CGT members all the way along the paths of life and work.

78. On average, CGT records 41 000 to 50 000 new members every year. Our target of one million members would already be widely met, if this progress evenly covered all geographic and professional sectors, and if our members stayed. There are several reasons to this: workers' mobility; redundancies; some discontinuity in the passage from employed to retired, with 7 of 10 unionists lost; many members within legal aid services resign once their case is closed; there are difficulties of online membership structuring...

79. And yet, a union of social transformation must secure unionisation continuity, lifelong and across professional transitions! The number of active union members has been growing since 1991, but the numbers of retired members has been dramatically dropping.

80. This is urging us to reconsider the junction between:

81. – active workers and retired ones,

82. – professions and geographic areas.

83. Let us rethink our structure so as no union members is lost slipping through the net with a new job, redundancy, or a new address.

84. As for the junction between professions and territorial areas, we must tighten the bonds between District *département* Trades Councils (UD) and federations, and with their stronger collaboration they'll be closest to union members and workers. Between federations we must also secure the ties: the economy and the evolution of salaried work do not allow activists to work in their own «chapel» or «side by side» anymore; instead we must rethink the scope of unionism, the interactions, cross work facing a shifting workplace and tipped-over regions.

85. RESOLUTION 1

86. to be a members' union, closest to employees, CGT and its unions commit:

87. – to consult employees, regularly and perennially. Only if our union claims are understood and embraced by workers, shall we win the necessary arm-wrestle relationship to transform society;

88. – to lay the ground of our demands with the workers' concerns and workplace experience as brick and mortar, so doing, to reinvest the working world, build our union claims.

89. For a unionism that balances institutional process and time spent with employees, CGT and its unions commit:

90. – to carry CGT demands wherever workers' rights are debated and at stake. By choosing unionists and employees as a backbone, CGT will be at its strongest as a driving force emitting propositions. CGT's choice is to be present wherever the workers' rights are

negotiated, and fight for their interests; this does not mean we'll let ourselves be trapped in the employers' agenda. The relevance of our attendance to meetings of any kind must be collectively thought over, to avoid being caught up by institutional workload, taking up the time we spend with employees;

91. – to welcome on board all CGT organisations so that our representation in the various dialogue and/or decision bodies is not an experts' business only. The position of elected members and delegates within the organisation, their support, is the responsibility of the local unions to truly service the workers' will, in concert with CGT demands.
- 92. For broader union training, tailored to a class struggle based and mass unionism, CGT and its unions commit:**
93. – to train our unionists all along their activism and union life. There shall be no unionist left untrained at the CGT. As soon as they choose to join the CGT, our members shall have a first training and at least one level-1 training;
94. – to make our cross-branch level provide the common core curriculum; the organisations will be responsible for the setup of specific training adding on this main trunk, and do their best so their members receive the most comprehensive training;
95. – to train all the leaders and to « arm » the comrades for their responsibilities as delegates. Training for branch leaders and collective leadership must be developed as much as possible;
96. – to make training a unionisation tool and driver, allowing salaried workers to discover CGT and its values, founding principles and claims.
- 97. For a unionism phased on the evolution of the work community and its structure, CGT and its unions commit:**
98. – that there shall be no unionist without a union, and no union without union life;
99. – to make our best efforts to unionise all the workers regardless of their status, and thus help them fight the subordination relationships. To achieve this we have to go deeper into the cross work between professional/geographic areas, within the framework of resolutions 4, 5 and 6 adopted during the 49th confederal congress.
100. Union branches are the backbone of our organisation. Company-based or professional collective bargaining must rally all the workers, and the latter must recognise themselves in the common claims carried by CGT.
101. In parallel, structuring ourselves should not hinder our will to unionise employees. In order to help the working communities to regain the sense of collective belonging, we must change unionisation to make it touch base with the flaring hyper-insecurity as well as new labour forms which, though without the status of salaried work, are nevertheless subjected to economic subordinate relationships to the businesses they depend on. We must reflect on all possible forms to organise and unionise self traders, workers in *portage* or umbrella companies, pay-as-you-earn work and forms of « uberised » economy:

102. –to broaden our work with youth, and work with youth organisations in order to strengthen unionisation;
103. – to increase our effort to unionise managers, and with them, set up their specific claims by creating, growing and using specific tools and structures, such as federal unions and the UGICT CGT;
104. – to develop retired employees’ unionisation;
105. –to subject to fresh debate the issue of permanent union membership card, a major leverage to ensure seamless union continuity in a world of increasing professional transitions, professional and geographic mobility, and also to keep active workers unionised in their transition into retirement.
- 106. For more forceful ambitions to confederalise the region-levels, CGT and its unions commit:**
107. –to mature our considerations on the statutory evolution of the regional committees during the 52th congress, and bring them to an outcome.