

### 156. Topic 3: «Our relationships to other trade unions, to politics and associations »

#### 157. Introduction

158. It is for CGT to be an organisation which translates the workers' needs into claims that we develop and carry into a balance of power. Such a list of claims isn't built out of nowhere. Quite the contrary, those answers to workers' needs nest in a larger view of social transformation defined in our congress documents, the workplace being, with all its facets, one of the main gateways.
159. Assertive of this ambition to transform society and to achieve our goal, we create a balance of power, surrounded by a context of acute class warfare; means our activists and members conduct their union activity in an economic, political and social environment embedded in society: social ties must be created.
160. Life in and outside the workplace is a context that permeates both our union members and the workers around us; this changing environment does not bend our line, but of course it has an impact on the means to conquer or protect social gains threatened by the forces of capital, managerial or political.
161. Our union activity is also facing structural changes, the sign of our times:
162. – different forms of labour organisation and an increasingly isolated, insecure, and qualified work force;
163. – a digital revolution affecting our relationship to work and our methods of information and dissemination, and multiplying the sources of communication.
164. It is obvious that the battle of ideas which is our fight to have, takes place in a constant informational upheaval.
165. The speed of data transmission is speeding up our conduct and activity. It is a complex phenomenon, even more so as it comes with a zapping method carrying us in a flow of immediate reactions, one piece of information after the other, with no time for analysis, study, understanding of the nature and quality of disseminated items. Human and social relationships are under tremendous transformation in this new paradigm.
166. It is essential to pay attention to these mutations, as they indeed changed all the relations, inside or outside the workplace.
167. A useful, accessible, attractive CGT, cannot ignore the positive and negative changes in society, nor drift apart from what makes up the workers' day, whether they are active or retired. Our goal of mass unionism requires not to be cut off from realities.
168. Yet an efficient CGT will not let itself be dominated by its environment. We must endeavour to keep our grip on our environment, and keep in command.
169. This new space is in constant revolution and it is for us to determine how we relate to the other organisational forms in society, as well as all the components of our action and intervention scope.

170. It is crucial to define how we'll relate to the three main components of society, for an efficient union action and formalisation of our claims. The three stakeholders are: the other trade unions, the political sphere and associations.

**171. CGT and the other unions**

172. Since the legal recognition of trade unions and through the various steps granting them real rights, employers, supported by some political forces, have always tried to undermine our social gains.

173. The main cause of union divide, brought by the set up of other organisations than the CGT and the CFTC, which can be considered original entities, is essentially an ideological divergence. Employers, and some politicians, knew how to take advantage of these divisions. Observing the power acquired by employees when they organise into mass unionism, the capitalist forces seeks to tip the scale their way in the balance of power defined by class warfare. Even if our divisions were not born from outside influences, opponents have nevertheless pushed for divide and the various split-ups in the history of unions. Cracked open gaps are not enough for employers and they have always tried to further deepen them by creating sectoral, corporatist or regionalist workers organisations, and independent unions groups or coordination. We could add to the list, some ultra minority unions created under employer control in the private sector, or under political control in various public service enterprises. It is easy for everyone to think of some examples of management organisations totally fabricated by some well-known political label, solely to weaken the influence of historical unions such as CGT, in their company, or else to push for the signature of agreements adverse to employees.

174. With globalising capitalism, unions are facing new offensives and new challenges.

175. Trade unions are now aware that employers are organising across Europe and the world. We identify how many groups in industry, commerce, even services, spread across Europe or the whole world. This is the new configuration which brought the trade unions to join forces internationally as well as in Europe. This is how CGT decided to engage as founding member in ITUC. And from this analysis, integrate ETUC. CGT has a legitimate will to take part to the organisation of union actions on these two perimeters, and use its vote for leverage on the orientations and claim-guidelines of the ETUC and ITUC. (See International and European part of document).

176. In our country, overtime and following the multiplication of unions, an ideological process has been taking place deeply changing the very conception of unionism. The multifaceted European unionism had certainly a role in a kind of Europe-wide benchmarking of the forms of social relations existing in other countries, now serving as references. It is easy to gauge, accurately, how employers, politics, and some unions joined to transform the forms of action, workers' organisation and formalisation of social dialogue in our country.

177. From employers, this happened by head-on attacks against union rights and liberties, taking

the shape of discrimination, intimidation, even more and more blatant threats. CGT activists are facing different forms of retaliation and repressive measures. Employers go as far as deliberately and totally illegally violating the union rights and powers of staff representative bodies. The management lays social dialogue on a bed of blackmail, or seeks the validation of agreements through blocking minorities.

178. As for politics, law texts are written such as the recent « Macron » and « Rebsamen » laws, or some are getting commissioned such as Jean-Denis Combexelle who, under the fallacious pretence of struggle against unemployment and to supposedly boost economy, only rids company managers from all legal framework.
179. The conception of unionism infused by some players in society can be seen by supportive streams of employers' views or recommendations from circles of liberal thinkers, merging to finally come out as draft laws. We counteract in favour of social transformation and social progress reforms, and against social regress reforms.
180. The shared ambition of these bodies is to snatch away the CGT's proximity unionism: in the balance of power, we build on exchanges with employees and their direct intervention through the decisions of mobilising the workplace.
181. But employers, liberal political forces and some unions, join their efforts to initiate a union-by-delegation, based on institutionalisation; this form of union keeps employees out of decision-making rings and either ignores or shunts social democracy. It is a drift to a lobbyist approach where negotiation gives way to compromised connivance, inexorably hurling workers into a collapse of their rights and social gains.
182. We, CGT, stand for social progress in our union claims, and union democracy in our process; this must be the guiding line of our activity.
183. CGT and its activists are engaging into this highly ideological battle which, beyond reshaping and disfiguring the conception of unionism, ambitions to settle globalised capitalism and liberal policies as many intangible dogmas. It's a strong political pretense in which there is no other choice but austerity and social conquests must be sapped to meet economic contingencies. Primarily, the overarching goal of this trend is to muck up unions forces and employees into a mire where the only options are to accept and go along decisions made by employers and/or politicians. To list some past years examples: Competitiveness agreement, the January 2013 National Cross Branch agreement (ANI) on job security, the December 2013 Agreement on vocational training, the unemployment benefit scheme (Unedic) or the agreement on supplementary pensions (Agirc and Arco)...
184. In parallel, some other trade unions tend to push employees to sever all forms of social relations, in a process which is neither based on social democracy nor on the construction of a real test of strength.
185. This explains why CGT must have an ever stronger resolve to rally employees around our values, orientations and union goals. Bringing employees together around their own

demands can't be done by isolating them or being content with minimalist gatherings. Power becomes concrete the minute we win the assent of crowds.

186. This is the purpose that has driven CGT to write, for over fifteen years, the concept of « rallied, coalesced unionism » in its orientations. It consists in creating the conditions to gather employees around our united organisation, and together set up platforms of demands able to skew the balance of power in our favour. This approach always targets new social gains- whilst staying on the course of our union goals. The widest possible gathering of CGT unions gives to employees the image that we are consistent with our conception of converging forces as a means to build up the struggle. This commitment does not contradict our identity.
187. Uniting and rallying, even outside union perimeter, different youth organisations, CGT works on disseminating its ideas. The uniting process of youth organisations is a very strong point of support and an investment for the future.
188. Even with the largest possible unity as a goal, our ambitions for social conquests and our focal point are kept safe from any down-levelling. Quite the contrary, this very context of debate and united action can demonstrate how legitimate our proposed demands are, how relevant our orientations.
189. This uniting approach strongly contributes to reinforce our organisation; at the end of the day, this preserves our conception of unionism: to protest, confront, propose, act and negotiate. It's what we do.

#### **190. CGT and politics**

191. The issue of CGT relationships to politics dates back to its origin. The Amiens Charter, in the preamble of our statutes for nearly one hundred years, deals with the subject. But a Charter is a guideline. It defines a recommended conduct which is necessarily challenged by what the CGT does, i.e. men and women working in an ever-evolving context, which creates variations in interpretation and implementation.
192. CGT relates to politics on three different levels: relations to politics, relations to political parties, and relations to political elected representatives.
193. Relations to politics are the clearest indeed. CGT contributes to « the life of the city ». We aim at influencing society and transform it. So we establish orientations which are political in order to lever on political decisions. Each positioning statement on the way the world, Europe, or the country are run, each CGT standpoint on current topics affecting the lives of workers, wherever they live in the world, is a political act.
194. To advocate for peace, freedom, democracy: this is political. To fight all forms of discrimination is a political position. To oppose the oppression exerted by the forces of capital, to demand that wealth be distributed in favour of workers through salaries and employment, improved working conditions or the design of social protection: these are political acts. Just as the engagement of our trade unions on environmental causes, is

political, for we want to transform society. Hereby we claim that there is no litigious object, nor source of controversy in our endeavour, because how we relate to politics is just not the point. It is a totally conscious, unambiguous choice to be politicised and to impact political choices with the weight of our union goals and orientations.

195. Relation with political *parties* is more of a controversial subject. CGT, as a full component of what makes up society, is bound to have relations with political parties.
196. For some unionists, life at the workplace comprises their engagement to the trade union; their engagement to a political party is an extension of their citizenship. For some, this is a natural continuity, while others keep both dimensions strictly separate.
197. Other union members, surely the majority, choose not to engage politically.
198. However nobody can pretend that politics have no influence on our activism. Such compartments of mind cannot exist.
199. This is why the life of our organisation, at every one of its structural level, must fend off all forms of intrusion. This is the very meaning of our statutory foundation: CGT and its unions cannot suffer being the instruments for such and such political force to gain privileges or advance.
200. This statutory provision exists precisely to help us identify the very nature of our union bodies' relations with political parties.
201. Contacts between union forces and political parties are natural, even inevitable in a democracy. The important thing is to set frame for the final goal of these relations, as well as their contents, for the safeguard and partition necessary to our independence.
202. This notion of independence is quite simple to implement. There may well be converging interests; together we may fight for workers' benefit or convey a labour-related demand. However this common endeavour cannot be a merge of identities and every player will retain its specific role and autonomy of decision and action.
203. Neutrality is rather more difficult to assess. Unbiased relationships are impossible, whenever there are ideological beliefs and active engagement. But situational collaboration should not threaten our neutrality vis-à-vis such and such political party. The boundaries of neutrality, less clear than these of independence, become clearer with the assertion that neutrality does not mean indifference. Vis-à-vis a political body, neutrality is not ideological; it is a neutrality of structure and organisations.
204. At last, we must consider possible relations with political elected representatives. It is inconceivable to think that there are no circumstances leading to contacts with the elected of the Republic, local and national.
205. In this area as in the abovementioned, the very nature of the relations defines their integrity. Now to influence political decisions and fuel the elected representatives' reflection or position, no matter how this is done, helps the balance of power work its way.
206. Our orientations on the country's reindustrialisation, on the choices to preserve and develop public services, our fight on energy transition and the global warming, our union

demands on housing, as well as on employment, salaries, working time reduction or social protection, etc. all get us implicitly to meet with elected representatives, regardless of their level of responsibility or rank in decision-making. On many occasions, we have had to operate outside the workplace to make our claims come true. This does not mean that our organisation is losing its independence vis-à-vis elected representatives. It means that CGT is fully legitimate in its intercession with decision-makers in order to fight. The only condition is that everyone remains in the boundaries of his or her assigned task without any interfering attempt from the stakeholders.

207. Such relationships with political parties or elected members of the Nation, when sincere, honest and independent, are the best indicators of CGT's role and posture in society. Attempts by some elected representatives or political leaders to draw us away from our Labour Exchanges and disqualify us into 'intermediary bodies' are true signs of the will to exclude the trade unions, CGT in particular, from the life of the city. This is why it is essential not to yield an inch, and to forcefully fight those abusive drifts, harming the democracy and trade union recognition.
208. One specific trait on the political scene here: far wing activists and political elected representatives. Given the blunt frontal opposition between CGT's human, social and societal values, and the foul ideologies within those political forces' programme, relations or contacts with elected representatives or activists from extreme right, are neither acceptable nor tolerable.
209. Given our background, the CGT would not feel compelled to voice such assertions, if it wasn't for a trend of thought pretending that these parties or political groups labelling themselves 'the extreme right' are legitimate republican and democratic forces. The National Front may join the Senate, National Assembly or the European Parliament, and some elected representatives claiming to belong to the far right may run as city mayors, we do not grant them any recognition as republican political parties.
210. It is for the CGT, a little more than seventy years after WW2 preceded by the rise of fascism in France and Europe, a little more than sixty years after the end of French colonialism, to reassert that extreme right and National Front ideas don't belong in our organisation. We reject all contact with the parties of this political orientation and we will fight and fend them off the national and European political field.

#### **211. CGT and not-for-profit-associations**

212. Since they were created by the 1901 Law, not-for-profit associations thrived in France, developed abroad. Some operate in different countries under the NGO label. Associations have widely extended their action range to all the areas of society.
213. Many associations have won recognition and are now taken into account in debates and political decisions. Sometimes, given their new role, associations may be used as covers for some political forces or trade unions. In some other cases, they are created as replacement,

even opposition, forces, facing political parties and trade unions.

214. No matter what we think of these facts, associations may have great impact in some economic or social areas; given their position in society, our organisation from local to the national levels, can establish relations.
215. CGT unionists may well, as citizens, become members of an association and even create one to undertake a local project or advocate for collective interests outside labour and the workplace.
216. CGT itself chose to create associations. For instance, Indecosa is a consumer protection association; our institutes of regional social history, and federal social history at the confederal level; national and international solidarity, with L' Avenir social.
217. These associations created by the CGT are not meant to have a purpose of their own; they are to support the CGT in its demands and its view on transforming society. Their assignment is also to support workers on issues which are not disconnected from our union approach though they're outside the CGT's scope of action. Creating an association, for CGT, is by no means a stopgap for union action but a complementary source skewing the balance of power in the favour of our bargains and orientations; then we'll reap success and progress.
218. This set of components demonstrates that the CGT cannot cut itself apart from its associations. Based on the nature, origin, composition and purpose of the association, it belongs to the CGT unionists to collectively set limits to the nature of these relations.
219. It must be reminded that the perimeter of an association is by definition strictly limited; in this it fundamentally differs from our union. Common struggles can be fought; however, their end-goal can be very different. CGT's contents of demands may have commonalities with the goal of an association; however major divergences may occur in a given subject, or even a major opposition in terms of alternative propositions or forms of action. These situations often recur when debating environmental protection or struggling to protect and develop public services.
220. This is clearly showing the limits to set in the common construction of the balance of power; we need to every time keep our independence, and command the decisions when involving our organisation into joint actions.

### **221. RESOLUTION 3**

222. For a rallied, coalesced unionism to transform society, CGT and its unions commit:
223. – to the goal of bringing workers together under the resolve of social transformation;
224. – to the permanent goal of the largest possible convergence of actions by the unity of unions to carry common and shared demands;
225. – to pursue our goal of «rallied coalesced unionism» written in our orientations;
226. With regards to this goal, we need to keep exchanging with trade unions on the topics of our demands, and carry on the work engaged with the FSU, particularly on taxation and public finance matters in order to:

227. – fight against all attempts to divide workers, or even pit them against each other;
228. – to have proximity unionism, democratic process and the direct intervention of workers as tow lines for our union’s course of action.
229. For a totally independent unionism that is a stakeholder in society, CGT and its unions commit:
230. – to influence policies in every possible way, in line with our orientations and demands, because we aim at transforming society;
231. – to maintain relationships with republican political forces, whilst keeping our independence in ideology and action;
232. – to keep our structure and organisation neutral vis-à-vis political parties and elected representatives, and to reject all forms of intrusion in, or interference with, CGT;
233. – to take action in all workplaces and all territories against the extreme right and the ideas it conveys, weapons to divide the workforce. CGT will pursue and intensify its campaign to fend off the National Front and the extreme right, its audience, its populist propositions destroying the whole working world;
234. – to build up the balance of power along with associations whenever useful, in compliance with our propositions and inner democratic debates;
235. – to keep our independence in ideology and structure when conducting joint actions with one or several associations;
236. – to create an association with the sole purpose of complementing our union action;
237. – to become a member of an association for the sake of citizenship, provided the independence of our organisation vis-à-vis the association is guaranteed.