

ABOUT THE ‘ALLIANCE SYNDICALISTE’

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*I dedicate this work to my old
and irreplaceable friend,
now deceased, Jacky Toublat,
who got me involved in this story.*

The “Alliance syndicaliste” was formed in the aftermath of the strikes of May 68 when many anarchists active in the mainstream unions noted the failure of the anarchist movement to organise anything meaningful.¹ The initiative came from the anarchist movement itself, and more particularly from the syndicalist part of the movement. Not all of them defined themselves as anarcho-syndicalists, some were simply anarchists who had union activity. At the beginning, in the group's founding meetings, there were some activists from the Anarchist Federation, including some most prominent “veterans” (“historical” activists I would say), from Paris and Bordeaux, most of whom were in the trade union confederation “Force ouvrière”².

Surprisingly, Maurice Joyeux and Suzie Chevet gave their “blessing” at the beginning of the Alliance, but these two comrades stopped caring about it once it was “launched”.

1.

The initial objective of the project was very modest: to coordinate the activity of libertarian activists who were located in the existing trade union

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- 1 I would like to thank Serge Aumenier for the comments, suggestions and advice he gave me during the review of this work.
 - 2 “Confédération générale du travail - Force ouvrière” (CGT-FO), which reflects its Cégétist origins, is a French trade union confederation, created in 1947.

Confederations³. Among these activists, there were of course “grassroots” activists, but there were also quite a number of activists who had union responsibilities at the workplace or at the local and regional level. It was therefore not strictly speaking a question of creating an “organization” but simply a coordination. But in the end, it didn't work out that way.

Some activists quickly understood what was at stake in such an initiative and we had to react vigorously not to become, through the so-called “anarcho-syndicalist” militant Alexandre Hébert, a kind of branch of the pseudo “Anarcho-syndicalist” tendency of the IVth “Lambertist” International⁴. Fortunately, the attempt failed. The attraction of the novelty faded, the participants who attended the first meetings returned to their usual routine and we found ourselves a handful of activists facing a task that seemed impossible to accomplish.

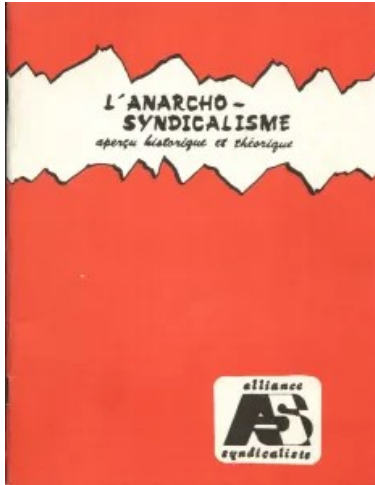
Over the years, one of the main points to emphasize is that the Alliance has been engaged in a real dusting off of the theory, whereas this was not at all the initial objective. This is what the author of a brochure, “La CFDT et le syndicalisme révolutionnaire” notes.⁵

Some of the Alliance's Parisian militants had attended Gaston Leval's “Centre de sociologie libertaire”. This is where I met Jacky Toublet, who embarked me on the adventure. Leval's concern was to provide libertarian militants with solid theoretical training. He placed particular emphasis on

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- 3 In the heroic days of the CGT there was only one trade union confederation, but the hazards of history led philosophical or political currents of thought to create an organisation corresponding to their desires. To simplify, after WWII the labour movement was divided into 4 confederations:
 - a) The CGT, the majority, dominated by the communists.
 - b) The CGT-Force ouvrière, anti-communist, but with an active minority of Trotskyites (Fourth International), French and Spanish anarcho-syndicalists.
 - c) The CFTC (French Confederation of Christian Workers) dominated by Christians.
 - d) The CFDT (Confédération française démocratique du travail), which grew out of the CFDT but retained a strong Christian influence. After May 1968, this organisation was tempted by extreme left-wing ideas (self-management, etc.) but the liberal temptations of its leaders ended up dominating.
 - 4 The so-called “Lambertist” current is a Trotskyist current launched by Pierre Bousset, alias “Pierre Lambert”, represented by the Lambertist Fourth International and present in several countries. The name “Lambertist” is a label given by its opponents, and not a name that this current would use officially. The majority of the future Lambertists were excluded from the Internationalist Communist Party (ICP) in 1953 for their opposition to the strategy of entry into the Stalinist parties advocated by the leadership of the Fourth International, then directed by Michel Raptis alias Michel Pablo.
 - 5 CSR, BP 3, 31240 Saint-Jean. E-mail : syndicaliste@wanadoo.fr.

the need to acquire knowledge in economics. He was also desperate for the anarchists' ignorance of the history of the workers movement. Gaston's living room on Boulevard Edgar-Quinet, near Montparnasse, was lined with books, which overflowed onto the furniture and piled up on the floor. For forty years Gaston had filled out cards on all kinds of subjects and stored them in boxes.

We all have fond and grateful memories of the meetings at his home, around the dining room table, where in turns we made presentations on different subjects. The young people we were thought we knew everything. In particular, we thought that a peremptory statement could be used as an argument. With Gaston, any approximation or unfounded statement was doomed to the master's wrath. Our ego was taking a heavy hit. Marguerite's sauerkraut – his partner, an Alsatian – sometimes soothed our wounds of self-esteem.



We finally broke up with Leval to get into the action. “You're not ready yet!” he told us. We, for our part, were in a hurry to act. We left. Children have

to challenge their fathers, one day. But it can be said that the comrades who passed through his benevolent but firm guardianship later found themselves particularly well armed.

Gaston frequently said that “you don't make good activists with ignorant people”. We learned our lesson. How often have we seen anarchist militants unable, out of ignorance, to respond to an argument? It is therefore undoubtedly Gaston Leval's libertarian heritage that has passed to the Alliance, as far as our organisation's concern to develop theoretical reflection was concerned. I will not insult the reader by reminding who Gaston Leval was⁶, I will simply say that his links with Spanish anarcho-

6 Gaston Leval (born Pierre Robert Piller, 1895–1978) was the son of a French Communard. He escaped to Spain in 1915 during the First World War, where he met the young firebrand and writer Victor Serge and joined the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) anarcho-syndicalist trade union organisation. Travelling in 1921 to Moscow as a CNT delegate to one of the most important organisations of the international communist movement, Leval wrote an influential report and a series of skeptical articles based on his experiences of the Bolshevik regime and attempted to spearhead action on behalf of imprisoned

syndicalism are not to be demonstrated.

2.

With regard to the reference to revolutionary syndicalism, we made a distinction between the French and Spanish meanings of the term, and we adhered to the Spanish meaning.

The militants of the Spanish CNT defined themselves as revolutionary syndicalists. [The use of the term “anarcho-syndicalist” appeared relatively late in Western Europe, after the Russian revolution and was only widely used in the 1930s.] Libertarian communism was the objective, revolutionary syndicalism was the means. The Spanish comrades had been influenced by the positions of the CGT-SR and were familiar with the texts written by Pierre Besnard⁷.

In the French sense of the term, revolutionary syndicalism was a related current, but it was based on trade union “neutrality”, on trade union “independence”, while anarcho-syndicalism was, in our opinion, a doctrine of trade union affirmation *against* political parties.

The “Charter of Amiens”⁸ was the reference text when the Alliance was set up; this is very clear when you read the “Manifeste de l’Alliance

anarchists and socialists. After living in Argentina for much of the 1920s and '30s, Leval returned to Spain and became a militant fighter while documenting the Revolution and both urban and rural anarchist collectives. (<https://blog.pmpress.org/authors-artists-comrades/gaston-leval/>)

7 Pierre Besnard, born in 1886, a railway worker with the state railway since 1909, appointed chief postman at Autueil station in December 1919, was dismissed for strike action in May 1920 during the Great Railway Strike, which was unfortunately unsuccessful. In 1921, he became general secretary of the central committee of the Revolutionary Syndicalist Committees, created in 1919 within the C.G.T. and bringing together anarcho-syndicalists, revolutionary syndicalists and communists. After the Saint-Etienne congress of the newly created C.G.T.-U., where his motion was rejected by 848 votes to 399, he founded, at the end of 1922, the Comité de défense syndicaliste, in order to save syndicalism from the communist takeover. This did not prevent the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists from being defeated again at the Bourges congress in 1923 on the question of affiliation to the IWA. He participated in the foundation of the CGT-SR in 1926.

8 In 1906, a CGT congress was held in Amiens, northern France, at which a resolution was adopted which later became known as the “Charter of Amiens” and which is regarded as the standard statement of revolutionary trade unionist doctrine. This issue is controversial. See: “Anarchism and syndicalism, 1871-1914”, http://monde-nouveau.net/IMG/pdf/digression_on_anarchism_and_syndicalism_31-05-2019_bis-2.pdf

Syndicaliste”, which was our basic document at the beginning. This was the time when we thought we could bring together all libertarian or libertarian-sensitivity trade union activists, and when our project was limited to wanting to create a coordination of these activists beyond their trade union membership. Faced with reality, we gradually began to make a critical analysis of the “Charter of Amiens”, which eventually ceased to be a particular reference. In 1906, it was a compromise text of different tendencies united against guesdism⁹, a text in which everyone could find their way, but the notion of trade union neutrality that emerged from it could be interpreted as an affirmation of non-intervention on the political scene.

The idea of trade union neutrality then expressed the desire to maintain organic unity despite the plurality of political currents. But inevitably, the logic of the facts lead to more clear-cut positions on the part of revolutionary syndicalism, because the search at all costs for consensus led to a watering down of the movement's principles. For example, there is nothing in the Charter of Amiens about the struggle against the state or about the illusions of parliamentarianism and antimilitarism.

The Charter of Amiens was therefore for us a compromise text, in no way a revolutionary or anarcho-syndicalist trade union manifesto. The opponents of these currents had perfectly understood what was at stake in this text, rightly interpreting it as a defeat of anarchism in the CGT. Edouard Vaillant (socialist, MP from 1893 onwards) said that the Amiens Congress was a victory *over the anarchists*; Victor Renard (guesdist leader) said more trivially: “The anarchists who predominate in the CGT have agreed to put a muzzle on themselves.”

We were therefore rather in favour of the Lyon Charter (1926 – same year as the Arshinov Platform...). Our revolutionary syndicalism was that of the CGT-SR, which affirmed the need for trade unionism not only to develop outside political parties, but against them. This attitude is in a way an echo of the 21 conditions for admission to the Communist International, which recommended in particular the constitution of communist fractions in the trade unions in order to take control of them. The CGT-SR's Lyon Charter states that syndicalism is “the only class movement of workers” :

“The fundamental opposition of the aims pursued by parties and groups that do not recognise the essential role of syndicalism also forces the CGT-SR to stop observing trade union neutrality, which has hitherto been traditional.”

9 From the socialist leader Jules Guesde (1845-1922), a sort of proto-leninist who advocated the submission of the unions to the party.

This was also the position of the Spanish comrades.

One of the particularities of the Alliance was that its members were not teenagers who had broken away from paternal authority, as could often be seen at the time in anarchist groups: they were experienced militants aged 25 to 40 or more, but also “veterans” of the CGT-SR or Revolutionary syndicalist committees (Comités syndicalistes révolutionnaires – CSR¹⁰) and, in the case of the Spanish, CNT veterans linked to Frente Libertario. The Alliance was closely linked to these historical experiences.

Among them was Roger Hoyez, who participated in the founding of the Alliance and was the first editor of the Alliance's newspaper, *Solidarité ouvrière*. Hoyez was in the 1950s the secretary of the CGT union of iron carpenters. As a revolutionary syndicalist, he was opposed to the control of the communist party and he had to occupy the CGT headquarters with other comrades in a “muscular” manner at least once in order to obtain the renewal of his union's cards. However, during the events in Hungary in 1956, he took part in the armed defence of the headquarters of the communist party during an attack by fascist groups¹¹.

3.

It seems that today a tendency is slowly emerging in opposition to traditional “leftism”¹². This new tendency is committed to trade union action, and refers to revolutionary syndicalism. But they refer to a revolutionary syndicalism that asserts itself in opposition to anarcho-syndicalism, accused of being too closely linked to anarchism. Thus, the author of a brochure, “La CFDT et le syndicalisme révolutionnaire” presents as a drawback the fact that the Alliance had not abandoned its reference to anarchism. We felt we had nothing to be ashamed of when we claimed the heritage of Fernand Pelloutier and Emile Pouget, who were syndicalists, but also anarchists.

Those of us who were at CGT¹³ were well aware that the reference to

10 The Comités syndicalistes révolutionnaires (CSR) were a trade union structure created in 1919 within the Confédération générale du travail (CGT) by activists of the pre-war revolutionary syndicalist current, such as Pierre Monatte, who were opposed to the CGT's collaboration with the government during the First World War. The CSRs brought together a core of militants who were to spread and organize themselves in preparation for the CGT Congress held in Lyon in September 1919.

11 See: <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article154603>

12 It should be remembered that this text was written in the late 1990s

13 If the activity of the Alliance was largely linked to the CFDT, we also had comrades in the CGT, in Paris and in the provinces. We must not forget that. In the 70s, it was not always easy...

anarcho-syndicalism had a real impact. In the French workers movement, despite deep disagreements, no one questioned the historical legitimacy of this movement, which was not the case for the Trotskyists, who were assimilated to petty-bourgeois intellectuals.

This did not prevent us from being critical of the inability of our elders of the syndicalist movement to organize themselves to confront the Bolshevisation of the CGT in the 1920s and 1930s. After the Russian revolution, our elders were confronted with a practice they did not know : communist fractions within the unions : the Communists organized themselves outside the trade union structures to determine the positions they would develop within it; a few organized militants coordinating their interventions, facing a mass of unorganized members, managed to take control of the unions, one by one. The syndicalists were unable to cope with this new practice or to find countermeasures. However, they had the excuse that these practices were totally new and contrary to the traditions of the French working class. An old comrade who had been active in the 1930s told us how eager the communists were to take up mandates in the CGT. The elders of the revolutionary syndicalist movement saw the communists occupying the functions with sympathy, because they saw them as the next generation. They had no awareness of what was happening.

It was in reference to this failure of our elders that we had the idea of creating “counter-fractions” to face the Trotskyists. In several trade union bodies we were confronted with Trotskyite cells that manoeuvred to try to take control. It was in reference to this failure of our elders that we had the idea of creating “counter-fractions”. It has proven to be very effective. These Trotskyists were simply implementing the measures put in place by the Bolsheviks, and in particular the 9th condition for admission to the Communist International, which said:

“It is the duty of any party wishing to join the Communist International to conduct systematic and unflagging communist work in the trade unions, co-operative societies and other mass workers’ organisations. Communist cells should be formed in the trade unions, and, by their sustained and unflagging work, win the unions over to the communist cause. In every phase of their day-by-day activity these cells must unmask the treachery of the social-patriots and the vacillation of the “Centrists”. The cells must be completely subordinate to the party as a whole.”

A relatively small number of well organized activists could very easily take control of an organisation made up of disorganized and dispersed persons.

“One of the most original things we have invented is the practice of counter-fraction. What is a counter-fraction? In a trade union organisation where political factions try to monopolise leading positions, it is necessary to form a more or less clandestine opposition structure with the objective of preserving, or restoring trade union democracy and pluralism; in this fraction, anarcho-syndicalists are the core and they constantly work to develop the counter-fraction, calling on all those who want the union to belong to the union and not to the PCF [*Communist Party*] or the LCR [*a Trotskyist organization*] or to the Christian social democracy. It is by no means an anarchist faction; it has no anarchist agenda, but a platform for the restoration of democracy, elections for positions of responsibility, general assemblies to manage struggles and discuss agreements¹⁴.”

We have used this tactic on several occasions and it has proved to be very effective. Maybe also because the Trotskyists didn't imagine that anarchists were capable of this.

In all this, the model we relied on was the Bakuninian Alliance – another reference to anarchism: an organization that promoted actions and ideas but did not replace the workers. I do not think that the use of the word “Alliance” in the name of our organization was accidental.

4.

If we defined ourselves as anarcho-syndicalists, most of us, at least in Paris, did not define ourselves as anarchists at all. At the time, we had the same mistrust of anarchist organizations as we did of parties. Opposed to the separation between class organization and political organization, we considered that the anarchist organization participated in this same division of labour. The articles of *Solidarité ouvrière*¹⁵ reveal very critical articles on Malatesta and Kropotkin¹⁶.

14 “Elisabeth, reading a proof of the interview, added Jacques Toublet, insisted on the fact that the counter-fraction could make it possible not to fall into the systematic majority/minority functioning. That is to say, to be critical also of the minority; she concluded that in the Health sector, in the name of the principle of the unity of the minority, the libertarians had followed the LCR [*trotskyists*] too closely. (Jacky Toublet, interview with Franck Poupeau, J. Toublet archives.)

15 *Solidarité ouvrière* was the monthly paper of the Alliance. The whole collection can be found on <http://archivesautonomies.org/spip.php?article754>

16 See: Libcom: “The Alliance Syndicaliste on Kropotkin, Malatesta and Bakunin, <https://libcom.org/library/alliance-syndicaliste-kropotkin-malatesta-bakunin>

Moreover, our relations with the FA (Anarchist Federation) had become very bad. Some of its militants tried to give us an apocalyptic image of dangerous manipulative Bolsheviks who only wanted to take control of the FA. The anti-allianceism of the FA was bordering on the most delirious paranoia. An activist of this organization once had the recklessness to leave the tape recorder containing the magnetic tapes of an FA congress in plain view on the front seat of his car. Of course, the tape recorder was stolen. In the FA's internal newsletter, the sneaky hand of the Alliance was identified as responsible for this theft.

The Alliance also had a reputation with the FA of being “Marxist”, or crypto-Marxist. This was due to the fact that we had developed a critical reflection on both Marxism and anarchism and that we recognized that there were still certain convergences that needed to be discussed: between Proudhon and Marx on economic analysis, between Marx and Bakunin on the right-wing drifts of some of Proudhon's successors, etc. Those who had read Proudhon's *System of Economic Contradictions* and Marx's *Capital* were still able to see that there was some convergence of views. But obviously, you had to have at least read these two books....¹⁷

One day, in one of the small rooms of the “Mutualité”¹⁸ in Paris, the Fédération Anarchiste held a meeting with the great charismatic figure of the period. One of our comrades was expelled by the said charismatic figure who threw a chair at him – the old man was vigorous – because our comrade had talked about “surplus-value”. Of course, it was Marxism....

We have long dragged this reputation among the FA militants. When the Alliance dissolved itself around 1982, some comrades in Paris immediately applied to join the FA. They encountered an incredible mistrust on the part of the militants who had the mandate of “Internal Relations”, undergoing real interrogations. It took them a lot of obstinacy not to turn heels and walk away.

I joined the FA a few years later, in 1984. I once participated in a workshop that discussed the possibility of creating a training structure for

Libcom quite rightly comments: “ASRAS, known as the “Alliance syndicaliste” or simply the “Alliance” (an obvious reference to Bakunin), had close links with the clandestine CNT in Spain. As the name implies, ASRAS was an alliance of syndicalists operating within the French unions to put forward revolutionary unionist ideas, to encourage militancy, and to prevent the capture of union branches by political factions.”

17 See: “Proudhon and the Problem of Method”,

https://www.academia.edu/39264248/Proudhon_and_the_Problem_of_Method

18 The “Maison de la Mutualité” is a building built in 1930 containing several meeting rooms and a large auditorium which originally had 1789 seats (in reference to the French revolution). It was a traditional meeting place for the Parisian left.

activists. Each person had to expose the themes they wanted to deal with. When it was my turn, it was finally declared that I would work with comrade “X”. I then pointed out that this good Comrade X was one of those who hysterically accused me of being a Trotskyite. I was answered: “Precisely”, which was a way of sticking a political commissioner to my back. I got up and walked away.

It is true that there was an internal discipline in the Alliance, but it was a very simple, basic discipline, I would say, consisting in applying the decisions taken, keeping one's commitments and arriving on time, this kind of thing, which was seen as Bolshevism for the FA.

In fact, I think that what contributed to the image, frightening to FA activists at the time, of a coherent and united Alliance was the ability of its activists to stand up to everyone in a public debate, Marxists or not.

It is true that we were surprised by the lack of theoretical and historical training of many anarchist militants of the time. The youngest FA activists did not know that Gaston Leval (at least those who had heard about him) had been shockingly sidelined by the FA. He had the bad habit of being openly critical of certain aspects of the anarchist movement of the time¹⁹ and of certain charismatic personalities of the Anarchist Federation. Moreover, his displayed Bakuninism was badly perceived because many militants thought that the Russian revolutionary was too “Marxist”.

For some strange reason, Bakunin was not in favour in the FA. A more recent illustration of this observation is the fact that the comrades who published for years a review, *Itinéraires*, devoted to the most prominent militants and thinkers of the movement, have forgotten Bakunin.

So the Alliance had little relationship with the FA, except personal relationships with some activists. The Alliance recruited few anarchist militants. Through trade union channels it recruited militants with field experience, but who had no particular link with the anarchist movement. In any case, this situation did not favour an “organic” connection, even if it had been possible. We didn't have to distance ourselves from anarchism. This distance was created by anarchism itself.

Anarcho-syndicalism was for us a doctrine and practice that could and should do without anarchism. This meant that we were far from Sébastien Faure's “synthesis” ; we also thought that a great distance separated Malatesta from Bakunin: our sympathies obviously went to the second,

19 See Gaston Leval, 1967: “La crise permanente de l’anarchisme”, <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article259>

This study is a devastating assessment of the situation of the anarchist movement at the time. Naturally, it did not win him only friends.

qualified by Gaston Leval as the founder of revolutionary syndicalism²⁰ – an attractive but unconvincing assumption.

The virtual absence of relations between the Alliance and the Anarchist Federation was mainly due to the FA's fear of an organization that was perceived as something mysterious and alarming, a kind of elitist secret society spending its time plotting. We wanted the trade union activists of the FA to join us to coordinate their activity with ours, and indeed some comrades did so, in particular the Fresnes-Antony group composed of particularly dynamic young people, including Hervé Trinquier who later engaged in the great adventure of the TLP (Paris Libertarian Theatre), and Jean-Louis Larédo who participated in the drafting of the statutes of the STC (Syndicat des travailleurs corses).

These are the comrades who later acted as a bridge between the Alliance and the FA when the former dissolved and some of its activists, including myself, joined the latter...

5.

THE UTCL (Union of Libertarian Communist Workers).

Relations with the UTCL were of a completely different nature. The Alliance's principled position was to coordinate the activity of libertarian militants in the labour movement. This also applied to UTCL. There had been some attempts at rapprochement, which had failed. I remember a national conference between our two organizations, held in 1977 in Paris²¹. The UTCL militants seemed to us a little like Martians, dogmatic and rigid, with a totally stereotypical language imitating Trotskyism. It was difficult to consider them as libertarians. They were so identical to the Communist League (a Trotskiist organisation) that it would have been easier to propose working with the League.

Paraphrasing Trotsky who accused the workerists of having “their noses in the asshole of the working class”, we used to say that the UTCL had its nose in the asshole of the Ligue communiste.

Even more than the Alliance, the UTCL was the thorn in the flesh of the FA, probably because it was indirectly derived from it – it was the split of a split of the FA...²². Of course, we did not share the FA's terror of the

20 Gaston Leval, “Bakounine, fondateur du syndicalisme révolutionnaire”, <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article3>

21 Some documents of this period have survived. See: “Octobre 1977 : Conférence nationale des travailleurs libertaires”, <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?rubrique65>

22 The ORA was a libertarian communist group created in 1967 as a tendency within the Anarchist Federation. The group split in 1970 to become a separate organisation and disappeared in 1976. But in the meantime a tendency had been formed within the ORA in 1974, the Union of Libertarian Communist Workers

UTCL, but in return our attempts to define common actions with the latter made us even more suspect in the eyes of the FA. We thought that the UTCL was the symptom of the FA's failure to propose an alternative in terms of organization, at a time of intense class struggle, and that the UTCL, itself unable to propose an alternative, had come to purely and simply imitate the Leninists.²³

6.

The question of the CNT(f)²⁴: At the time, there was a CNT in France, which we had contacted, according to the principle that the Alliance, not questioning each other's affiliations, was content to coordinate the struggles of libertarian militants.

I remember a meeting with a kind of arrogant guy who summoned us to join the CNT(f) or stop bothering them, the Alliance having no reason to exist because all libertarians had to move to the CNT(f), and that was it.

In principle, we had considered the possibility that one day the libertarians would perhaps have to leave the “reformist”, mainstream unions, but we felt that this day had not yet arrived. There was no point in switching *individually* to the CNT(f); it was a matter of whole whole trade union structures, or at least a substantial number of activists of these structures switching to the CNT(f). As far as I know, this never happened.

In France it is easy to create a trade union. All that is required is to file the statutes at the town hall of the commune where the union is established, to fill in the documents provided in duplicate and signed in original by at least two of the board members:

- statutes certified as true by the president and the secretary,

(UTCL), which was expelled in 1976. The UTCL became an organisation in 1978 and merged with the “Organisation Combat Anarchiste”. In 1986 a Collective of young libertarians was created, which came closer to the UTCL. The two organisations dissolved in 1991 and merged to create *Alternative Libertaire*. In 2019, *Alternative libertaire* merged with the “Coordination des groupes anarchistes” and formed the “Union Communiste libertaire”. However, in January 2022, 34 militants, most of them veterans, left the UCL exacerbated by the “woke” drifts of the organization.

- 23 The permanent obsession of Jacky Toublet was to constitute the unity of the libertarian movement, a movement anchored in the social struggles. Shortly before his death, Jacky had adhered to *Alternative Libertaire*, which was, following mutations of which I cannot tell the detail, the continuation of the UTCL.
- 24 I usually write this way the acronym of the organisation that took, by imitation, the same name as the Spanish syndicalist confederation, in order to distinguish them. I think that the comrades who formed this organisation after the war should have chosen another name, out of modesty.

- list of members in charge of the administration or management, indicating the names (birth name and spouse's name if applicable), first names, date and place of birth and personal addresses of each of them.

The deposit is recorded by a receipt issued by the mayor, who must keep a specific register for this purpose. And that is all. Employers are simply informed of the creation of the union and cannot oppose it.

The CNT(f) has benefited from these facilities, one of which is that you only need three persons to declare a union. In general, there are so few members in their unions that in order to “make numbers” the comrades create “interprofessional unions” which bring together members from several sectors of activity. In other words, when there is an “interprofessional union”, it is because there are not many members. This is what we wanted to avoid at all costs.

In the early 1970s, rightly or wrongly, we felt that there was still work to be done in the mainstream union movement; many of our comrades were activists or held elected positions in rank and file and intermediate (regional) structures. We thought that water would still flow a little further under the bridge before these activists would be able to bring whole unions or workplace sections with them to CNT(f)²⁵.

Our prediction came true later, but the CNT(f) had nothing to do with it and it completely missed an opportunity. I am referring to the formation of SUD (Solidaires Unitaire démocratique) in which there are many anarchists.

In December 1988 the split between the CFDT postal federation and its internal opposition was complete. The “black sheep” left the organisation to

25 We remembered something that many comrades do not know. After the war, the trade union organizations “that had not collaborated” were invited to make themselves known in order to recover the premises they owned in the labor exchanges. The CGT-SR had disappeared, but the newly formed CNT(f) declared itself as its successor. The comrades refused to take the step because they “didn’t want to owe anything to the state”. To this enormous stupidity, the comrades of the young CNT(f) added another one. In the few years following the Liberation, entire unions left the CGT because they were fed up with the Stalinists. Many of them came knocking at the door of the CNT(f). The comrades who received them asked them if they were anarchists. The guys obviously answered no, and they went to look elsewhere. This is how the FO Confederation was able to recover the unions that left the CGT. The young guy from the CNT(f) that we met in the early 70s seemed to us to be made in the same mold as his post-war predecessors. I should point out that the “anarchist zeal” of these comrades was quite contrary to the practices of the Spanish CNT which organized, fortunately, a large mass of workers who were not anarchists (1.5 million members under the Popular Front).

found SUD “Solidaires, Unitaires, Démocratiques”. The newcomer on the trade union scene developed rapidly, both in terms of membership and in terms of electoral audience. SUD-PTT (PTT for Post, Telegraph, Telephone) has become the second largest trade union organisation in this sector after the CGT. It also made inroads in other sectors, such as the railways and education. Many anarchists have accompanied this process, and in particular the Alliance syndicaliste in the Post Office.

It is significant that at no time did these militants think of joining the French CNT, although it could have been a pole of attraction, a role which it has not been able to play – or did not want to play.

At that time we thought that the CNT(f) could develop in sectors that were not or poorly organized, and that collaboration could be considered. This option was categorically dismissed. Curiously, our prediction became reality, but much later, and it took a series of splits within the CNT for one of them, the CNT-Solidarité ouvrière, to develop a real workers' presence in the cleaning, hotel and restaurant industries.

7.

We quickly realised that the Alliance's initial, very modest project was not feasible: to coordinate the activity of libertarian syndicalist militants, independently of their organisational affiliation. The success of this project was only very marginal: a few anarchist militants here and there joined us.

By force of circumstance, we were led to develop ourselves, not so much by trying to win the already organised libertarian militants as by developing ourselves in the workplaces, a task which, however, was only made possible because we had an implantation which was far from being ridiculous. In other words, we practically “extracted” ourselves from the organised libertarian movement. Should we have stopped referring to “anarchism” ? I don't think so, because it was on the libertarian ground of anarcho-syndicalism that the Alliance had been created and developed.

But gradually, the militants who came to us had absolutely nothing to do with the anarchist movement, they were militants from the trade union movement. Many, after having lived May 68, had become involved in the CFDT, particularly in interprofessional structures: they had rediscovered syndicalism in a spontaneous and pragmatical way and the Alliance militants simply explained them that what they had discovered was something that was deeply rooted in the working class. Syndicalist positions were spontaneously multiplying in local and regional structures.²⁶

26 The trade union movement in France is organised on the model of the “historical” CGT. It is made up of two structures, one “vertical”, the other

Things like this were regularly found in the documents of rank and file organisations:

- “The acquisition of class consciousness is not the result of membership in a political party, but of the practice of action and direct confrontation between workers in the union's decentralized structures”²⁷;
- “The destruction of the State by the general strike is the negative act of the revolution [...] It is only by resuming production on socialist bases that the revolutionary struggle will

“horizontal”.

The vertical structure is made up of trade unions, grouped into industry federations: Textile, Metallurgy, etc.

The horizontal structure is made up of what we call “local unions”, federated into regional unions up to the national level.

It is the federation of these two national structures that defines the existence of the CGT, and a union that does not pay its share of dues to the local union cannot declare itself a member of the CGT.

The local unions are places established in a locality (towns, or districts in large cities) in which the unions of the locality gather, independently of their sector of activity, hence the expression “interprofessional”. The local unions (or district unions representing a wider geographical area) are in a way the heirs of the Bourses du Travail (Labour exchanges) of the early days of the CGT. In the revolutionary trade unionist doctrine, the labour exchanges were an extremely important element of trade union activity because, by bringing workers together outside their workplace activity, they played an eminently political role, as Bakunin said. It follows that when a trade union organisation is eventually controlled by a political party, the latter tries to reduce the function of the local unions to a minimum because they constitute competition. Much of the activity of Alliance activists was to encourage and develop these horizontal structures.

The anarchists, of whom the best known was Fernand Pelloutier, played a decisive role from 1892 onwards in the creation and growth of the Fédération nationale des bourses du travail. This double structure, horizontal and vertical, corresponds perfectly to the scheme that Bakounne had described as early as 1869 (see: René Berthier, “Bakunin: a theory of organisation”).

“At the Congress of Montpellier in 1902 the CGT virtually became a ‘double organisation’ with a vertical structure (industrial unions) and a horizontal, geographical structure (the Labour Exchanges). I would add that this double structure, which defines revolutionary syndicalism and later anarcho-syndicalism, is very much in keeping with Bakunin's scheme.”) <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article378>

27 Rôle des unions locales, congrès de l'Union départementale 92, novembre 1972 (Role of Local unions, Congress Union Départementale 92, November 1972)

make a step forward”²⁸.

Such statements were frequent in rank and file or regional trade union congresses and had nothing to do with the Alliance, but they were a good way for our comrades to “spot” activists with whom they established contacts. It is largely thanks to such contacts that the Alliance has been able to exist for ten years; without them, we would have been just another vague and ephemeral attempt, which would have finally disappeared after a few months or would have survived in the form of a circle of ageing nostalgic people.

The Alliance had effectively transformed itself into a political organization whose objective was to develop in the working class and disseminate anarcho-syndicalism. In 1973, the CFDT's political sector, then led by Albert Détraz who displayed a certain libertarian sensitivity, published a brochure on anarcho-syndicalism written by comrades of the Alliance and aimed at informing those responsible for the various CFDT structures. Faced with numerous requests for additional copies, Détraz had a second edition printed. The distribution of the brochure was blocked by the confederal apparatus. It was after this that training sessions *against* anarcho-syndicalism appeared...

The very close contacts we had established with the comrades of the Usinor Dunkerque ironworks had nothing to do with the network of anarchist militants. This was the result of our union presence in the metallurgy sector, through which we came into contact with the activists of the Grande Synthe plant where Usinor was located. We had also established relations with the CGT dockworkers in Saint-Nazaire. None of them have joined the Alliance, but very close personal relationships had developed. These comrades were in contact with the Loire-Atlantique peasant workers' movement with which we made contact.

About Usinor-Dunkerque:

“When we contacted the CFDT section of this large factory at the beginning of the 1980s, more than ten thousand people worked in the company and the local section of the union represented about thirty percent of the votes in the professional elections and several hundred cards.

“It is following articles in *Libération*²⁹ that we went there; we

28 Contre-projet de résolution politique du Syndicat du commerce de Paris, Congrès Union Départementale 75, novembre 1974.

29 A vaguely left-wing daily paper at the time.

met some of the steelworkers who ran the section and who had problems with the CFDT apparatus. From the very first moments, Serge and I were very moved by these meetings. Whereas, often, when we made contact, we got to know people from the leftist movement, for example in the Health or Education sectors, for the most part the comrades we met in Dunkirk were pure products of the working class of the North, as hardened as they were united in their ordeal. They were suspicious of us, moreover. It lasted for some time.”

“Indeed, very quickly, the experience of the dissolution of the bureau of the departmental union³⁰ of the Gironde³¹ made us understand what was going to happen. For reasons which we didn't immediately perceive, these comrades were a nuisance, and we could guess from the account they gave us of the problems they were beginning to have with the local union, the local Union Départementale or the Metal Federation, that something was going to happen to them. They didn't believe us, at first, when we compared their situation to that of Bordeaux or Lyon-Gare, or others – they weren't oppositional militants but active trade unionists, with no qualms about the orientation and direction of the CFDT; the main part of their activities consisted of fighting their boss...

“Later, they confided to us that they had not really understood what the campaign launched by Edmond Maire meant when he denounced the “cuckoos”, who were very active at the time.

“The ‘cuckoos’, Maire insinuated, were the extreme left militants who laid their eggs in the nests of the CFDT – later, the same ones who would form SUD or the CRC would be the “black sheep”. The comrades at Usinor-Dunkirk did not understand that the ‘cuckoos’ were those, all those who, for one reason or another, displeased the Christian democrats of the confederal leadership. At Usinor-Dunkirk, the comrades did have a ‘cuckoo’, one in ten thousand, called Frank, more or less from the ‘mao-spontex’ movement, and, they said laughing, they had him well in hand!”

“They took no precautions, although we suggested it, to protect themselves from the storm that was coming. For example, they did not seek to form a company union in order to have the status of a legal person; they remained as a trade union section

30 Metropolitan France is divided into 99 “départements” which are administrative districts that could correspond to British counties.

31 The region of Bordeaux.

adhering to the CFDT. So, when the exclusions arrived, in the executive board of the Syndicat métallurgique de Dunkerque, they were in the minority – the bureaucracies know how to organize majorities!

“A certain number, the militants, were thrown out of the CFDT like dirt; Frank was also sacked...

“What were the fighting steelworkers of Usinor-Dunkerque going to do to continue the struggle? Join the CGT? For ten years they had been arguing with its militants...

“The group of expelled militants asked us to explore all possible solutions. To this end, I even met, at the Labour exchange in Paris, my comrade Pepito Rosel, an old Spanish anarcho-syndicalist who had taken refuge in the Force ouvrière union in the fifties, to examine an appeal. It was a waste of time. Besides, in the northern region, the Usinor friends informed us, FO-Metalworks union Métaux³² was the RPR (“Rassemblement pour la République, the Gaullist party)! They refused and launched themselves, with only a small group of anarcho-syndicalists as support, into the constitution of an autonomous union, proudly named Syndicat de lutte des travailleurs d’Usinor-Dunkerque (SLT). (Union for the Struggle of the Workers of Usinor-Dunkerque)

“We cannot dwell on the innumerable difficulties they had to face, first to make themselves known to the workers, then to be recognized as representative in the company... In any case, they managed to achieve representation; many also left the company, tired of it all.

32 “If the Usinor comrades had been as Machiavellian and dishonest as their opponents in the confederal leadership claimed, perhaps they would have joined Force Ouvrière, simply to jump the hurdle. To gain time to see what was coming. No doubt they were too sincere trade unionists to engage in such maneuvers. Unlike many “politicians”, who do not hesitate to do so. As a comrade who was a CFDT union delegate at the “Comptoirs de Montrouge”, which later became Schlumberger, was able to observe in the early 1970s. One day, he had mistakenly entered the local of the FO section, which was notorious for being run by Lutte ouvrière [Trotskiste] people and was almost inactive. What was his amazement to see the room, from floor to ceiling, entirely filled with fire extinguishers... It was only a few weeks later that he understood the reason for what had first appeared to him as an incongruity: Lutte ouvrière being “clandestine” did not have, at that time, any premises. Nevertheless, our Trotskyist comrades had to store the fire extinguishers necessary for their famous annual gathering. So they used the union premises, which they controlled for this purpose! One deduces from this that they were not trying to make too many members outside LO!” (Note by J.T.)

“We helped them as much as we could, with contacts or material aid; I remember that we gave them a SAM machine for printing leaflets. Because, after the exclusion, they had nothing left, no premises, no paper, no machines, no money... The school for proofreaders took Frank in for a few months, where he was bored to tears.

“A few more words. First of all, to underline how helpless we were, before the appearance of SUD or the rebirth of the CNT(f). We had nothing in store to offer to comrades who were being thrown out.

“And to send my best memory to Pierre Suray, who was an activist and treasurer of the SLT, if he ever reads these lines.

“I forgot: the real reason for the decapitation of the CFDT section of Usinor-Dunkerque was obviously the preparation of the modernization of the French steel industry, Dunkerque and Fos, which was going to be accompanied by various regroupings, mergers and numerous job losses. The section, in its original state, could have created real difficulties for the main shareholder, the French State. A preliminary clean-up was necessary and the CFDT leadership was an accomplice. (Jacky Toublet, interview with Franck Poupeau, archives J. Toublet.)

In fact, the Alliance was on the one hand a certain number of solid militants, a hard core, around which gravitated numerous contacts with militants and groups with which we had affinities but which did not envisage joining us. All of this worked rather well because we were more interested in what could bring us together than what separated us. It was a kind of spider's web of informal relationships, very much in the Bakunian tradition. Over time, something could have come out of it, but there were too few of us. We couldn't be everywhere at once, all the time. What made us angry was that the libertarian movement did not lack militants.

8.

One of the “creations” of the Alliance was the “Comité Espagne libre” (Free Spain Committee), in close collaboration with Frente Libertario. Frente Libertario was not strictly speaking a “dissidence” of the Spanish CNT; it was an organised movement in Spain and France that supported activists from within. We set up this committee to support the imprisoned Spanish libertarian militants.

With regard to Spain, the Alliance's position was simple: the anarcho-syndicalist movement in Spain had to determine its own bodies and strategy freely. Until this was possible, the Alliance supported internal militants in

struggle.

A number of CNT leaders in exile who had taken refuge in Bordeaux considered that *they* represented the legitimacy and continuity of the organisation despite forty years of exile. In Spain itself, however, the struggle had never stopped and the organization was being rebuilt systematically despite the repression.³³ There was a fierce conflict over the legitimacy of the historical succession of the CNT. The French CNT supported the positions of the exiled leaders. By affirming that it was up to the anarcho-syndicalist movement from within to define its positions, the

33 The militants who remained in Spain undertook to rebuild their organisation in clandestinity. Just before the end of the war, after the Catalan campaign, in occupied Barcelona, there remained militants of the CNT who, in clandestinity, maintained an organic continuity in various unions: transport, construction, metallurgy, graphic arts, entertainment. In a more precarious way, organic continuity was also maintained in the northern region, in Aragon and in Asturias. In the Centre-South zone, which fell last, the reorganisation of the CNT was carried out in the concentration camps themselves. The rapid sinking of this front and its centrality, geographically, did not allow a massive exodus as in Catalonia. The camps were filled with militants. In Albaterra (Alicante) 17,000 men were detained, almost all of them from the 25th and 28th Republican divisions, i.e. two columns of anarcho-syndicalist workers belonging to the CNT. Among them were several regional committees of the CNT. It was in a climate of daily executions and the most savage revenge that the workers understood that they had to maintain their organisation. Thus, the first post-war National Committee of the CNT was appointed in this camp, whose first mission was to save the most threatened companions. From that time on, 14 clandestine unions of the CNT were formed and operated in Catalonia. Barcelona had 30,000 members.

In 1940 the first National Committee of the CNT fell in Valencia in the Albaterra camp. All the members of the national committee were shot. In eight years, more than ten national committees followed one another. Destroyed one after the other, rebuilt one after the other. Several clandestine newspapers of the CNT were published. In Barcelona there was the traditional *Solidaridad obrera* (Workers' Solidarity) as the organ of the Regional Committee, as well as organs by industry such as *El Martillo* of the metalworkers' federation. In Aragon, *Cultura y Accion* had a circulation of up to 10,000. In Valencia there was *Fragua Social*. Asturias, the Basque Country and Madrid published their CNT Regional. *Fraternidad* was also published in Madrid in alliance with the UGT and Castilla Libre. While Franco's government recruited for the Azul Division in 1941, at the Maestranza de Ingenieros in Cadiz, the militarised workers went on a strike – the first after the defeat – led and supported by CNT militants.

With the return of the militants from 1944 onwards, the highest level of clandestine organisation was reached during the years 1944 to 1948. In 1947, the CNT had 60,000 members in Barcelona. *Solidaridad obrera*, published in a small format, had a circulation of 50,000 copies distributed throughout Spain by workers affiliated to the underground railway union. The CNT's networks

Alliance implicitly took a position against the leaders in exile, and consequently against the French CNT...

In fact, we had a very special relationship with Frente Libertario, which we supported and some of whose activists were in the Alliance. These comrades were opposed to the demands of exile to hegemony on the Spanish libertarian movement and actively supported the militants from within. We have therefore also participated in some actions to support the comrades from Spain. Jacky Toublet and I went to Spain under Franco, to meet in Barcelona and Madrid with CNT activists. In particular, the Alliance helped to provide them with printing equipment.

It is not possible to talk about the work in the direction of Spain without mentioning Antonio Barranco (1907-1992), one of the veterans who co-founded the Alliance. In Teruel, he was one of the founders, in 1929, of the Helios group of the recently created Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) and, two years later, he was one of the founders of the National Workers' Confederation (CNT) in the capital of Turia. Together with Pedro Abril, Víctor Ferrer and Raimundo Soriano, Antonio Barranco became one of the historical leaders of anarcho-syndicalism in Teruel, when in July 1931 they founded the CNT in that capital.

From 1933 onwards, Barranco devoted his organising skills to the national organisation of the CNT in the railway workers' sectors. He was at the heart of the railway strike on the Ferrocarril Central de Aragón line, which took place in the spring and summer of 1936.

He was then called to Madrid at the end of 1936 as a railway adviser to the Transport Council of the Defence Council. In 1944 it was established that he joined the clandestine national committees of the CNT in Madrid - those of Sigfrido Catalá, Leiva, Broto, Íñigo and Marco. In March 1945, as treasurer of the national committee led by Broto, Barranco managed to pre-

extended to the prisons, where meetings and assemblies were held.

The first major post-war strikes took place in the textile industry in Barcelona (1945-1946). In Biscay a general strike broke out on 1 May 1947. There was a great deal of propaganda in Barcelona. After 1946, once the fear of being dragged into the fall of Nazism and Mussolini fascism had passed, the regime felt strong enough to launch a second wave of repression. The police and the Falangists attacked the clandestine unions. Twenty national committees of the CNT fell. Seven national committees ended up simultaneously in the Ocana prison. The national coordination organisations were dismantled and the militants arrested. The confederal organisation, which had always had a vocation of mass union, had to close its ranks, to structure itself at the level of smaller groups.

Historians, both liberal and Marxist, situate the rebirth of workers' struggles in Spain around 1962, when a communist presence reappeared. Is it any wonder that the titanic effort of reorganisation made by the CNT from 1939 onwards is systematically ignored?

empt a police raid, taking refuge in the British embassy, from where he was able to carry out invaluable work for his clandestine union organisation. The British expelled him from the Spanish legation on 13 June 1946.

Barranco then worked in exile in France in a national sub-committee, went to Spain several times for “organic tasks” and, in 1963, was responsible for the administration of Cultura Ferroviaria and participated in the creation of the “Alliance Syndicaliste”.

The conflicts for hegemony over the anarcho-syndicalist movement can still be seen today in the split between the CNT and the CGT in Spain, which emerged from it.

9.

The brochure “CFDT and Revolutionary syndicalism” refers to a number of CFDT structures that developed revolutionary trade union themes and were part of the CFDT's “Revolutionary syndicalist” trend. The author of this brochure conceals two facts: the CFDT's “Revolutionary syndicalist” tendency was in fact made up of anarcho-syndicalists; all the examples he gives of “Revolutionary syndicalist” presence in the CFDT actually reveal the presence of the Trade Union Alliance.

The union section of the SEP, near Bordeaux, was quite strongly established and run by friends of the Alliance. The Gironde departmental union, which would be dissolved by the confederal leadership, was also led by comrades of the Alliance.

Interview of Jacky Toublet by Franck Poupeau :

“In the Bordeaux region, a group of friends who worked at the European Propulsion Company (SEP) decided to leave FO³⁴, which did little to improve relations with those who in this confédération called themselves anarcho-syndicalists, and to join the CFDT. Progressively, these comrades successfully established themselves in the metalworking industry and other sectors, such as Education. Then some of them were elected at

34 “FO”, or “Force ouvrière”, otherwise known as the CGT-Force ouvrière confédération, was a split in the CGT after WWII caused by unions who opposed the Communist Party's domination of the CGT. Many anarcho-syndicalists joined “FO”, but also many Trotskyists from the Fourth International. A sort of counter-natural alliance was created between the Trotskyist tendency and the anarcho-syndicalist tendency, which led to the constitution within the Trotskyist party of an anarcho-syndicalist “tendency” which we considered to be rather phoney.

On the relations between Trotskyists and anarchists within the “FO”, see: <https://materialisme-dialectique.com/le-soutien-trotskiste-a-la-cgt-force-ouvriere/>

the “Union départementale” CFDT of Gironde and in its bureau.

“It is obvious that, once they became members of the Gironde Union départementale bureau, the comrades began a work of consciousness-raising on various themes of revolutionary syndicalism, the demands, of course, but also on the content of self-management – the official slogan of the CFDT since its 1970 congress – and independence, at a time when they were beginning to talk about “committed autonomy” with the Socialist Party. The majority of the Confederation’s leadership then began its inflection to try to bring the enormous mass of new members, almost half a million perhaps, more or less influenced by the ideas of 1968, towards the trade union version of Christian democracy, which was, as we could see later on, its real ideology, in any case of those who, around Edmond Maire and the Chemicals Federation, would lead the right-handed turn.

“The two approaches were bound to clash...

“In addition, on several occasions, the comrades had distributed anti-militarist leaflets in railway stations when conscripts were leaving for their barracks. Well, in any case, around 1976, at a time that I cannot specify more precisely, the leaders of the Confederation dissolved the Union départementale bureau and sent the activists back to their original union. At the same time, the comrade who was the union delegate of the SEP, Vladimir Charov, was dismissed, with the agreement of the Ministry of Labour. Of course, we made as much noise as possible around the case. Wastefully: the management made fun of everything that we could say, with even more contempt than the “stalinists” – and the other far-left currents, as often in those years, saw the exclusion of workers from a neighbouring chapel as the disappearance of a competition. Thus the “Catholics” were able to apply the good old salami technique to almost all their opposition without too much difficulty³⁵. ”

There were many CFDT union sections in Paris or in the suburbs in which Alliance activists played an important role, in department stores, in insurance, in banks, particularly at BNP, in the food sector. I myself was deputy secretary of the temporary workers' union, a member of the trade federation, where we had comrades. It was, I believe, the only union that published a monthly magazine for militant sale on the street, at a time when temporary work was exploding.

35 Archives Jacky Toublet,

[http://monde-nouveau.net/ecrire/?](http://monde-nouveau.net/ecrire/?exec=article&id_article=38)

[exec=article&id_article=38](http://monde-nouveau.net/ecrire/?exec=article&id_article=38)

The particularly active local union of the 8-9th “arrondissement” (district) of Paris was led by Alliance militants. I can tell you very precisely how the poster affair that triggered the dissolution of the local union went down. At the time, I was no longer at the CFDT, I was at the CGT. I had gone to see the local union buddies, who were preparing a poster against the rapprochement of the CFDT and the Socialist Party (PS), and they wanted to put an illustration on it. I was the one who drew the drawing on the stencil, representing a boss on the back of a worker, with the legend “like your boss, join the PS”. In retrospect, of course, it was not very clever, or even a little irresponsible. But we must understand the context: the comrades were fed up with the pro-PS propaganda of the confederal leadership, besides they also knew that their freedom of action was limited and that it was only a matter of time before repression fell.. They were in the line of fire. Obviously, the drawing did not please....

“The Alliance had some activists in Paris, who created a local CFDT union in the 8th and 9th districts, which was fairly quickly dissolved by the confederation, around 1976: there were employee layoffs at Montholon – the then CFDT headquarters – to which the local union wanted to oppose. In addition, the Local Union had posted a poster throughout the borough with the following text: “Against unemployment, do as your boss does, join the Socialist Party”.

“Some comrades of the Alliance were also active in the Local Union CFDT of the 10th district; during the conflict of the “Parisien Libéré”, from 1975 to 1977, they gave various help to the comrades in the printing sector.”

“In the Hauts-de-Seine [*a district situated in the West and North of Paris*], in the years immediately following 1968, the Alliance and the ORA, which operated together in this sector, obtained a good foothold, particularly in the interprofessional sector, from services, teachers and metals. I remember that a comrade who declared himself a libertarian, Gérard Mulet, who was secretary of the Union départementale (Union Départementale) in Boulogne, was delighted that each Union Locale in the department had technical equipment and a militant collective that enabled him to actively support local movements. In addition, we had succeeded in getting an old Spanish comrade, Antonio Barranco, to work as a technical permanent at the Union Départementale, who, between two draws of leaflets on the offset machine in the basement, took care of the improvised trade unionist training of the activists who came to collect equipment...

“In the Val-de-Marne [*a vast district in the Est and South of Paris*], the secretary of the Union Départementale, Jacques Blaise, was a supporter of the Alliance; he was involved in all the Alliance's struggles and Alliance activists gave him all possible support in the struggles in his district...

“One of the founding members of the Alliance, Serge Aumeunier, an engineer at Aérospatiale, was for a long time treasurer of the CFDT's Union Parisienne des syndicats des métaux (UPSM). Serge and some of his friends, after they had been decentralized to Les Mureaux, did a big job in the Union Départementale of Yvelines and the Local Unions of the Seine Valley (Don't forget that at the time, at Simca-Poissy [a large automobile plant], there was a more or less fascist in-house union, the CFT.) The president and the employee of the local Building Union, Robert Simonet and Amy Braun, were members of the Alliance.

“In Health and Social, the Alliance had many contacts and some activists, Elisabeth Claude, for example; most of them are now in SUD-Health.

“Finally, from the few proofreaders who were members of the Alliance, René Berthier, Alain Pécunia, Thierry Porré, Pascal Nürnberg and myself, we had a few rare contacts in the printing industry, whether, CGT or CFDT.” (Jacky Toublet, interview with Franck Poupeau, J. Toublet archives.)

The Post Office section in Lyon-Gare [Lyon Railway station], also mentioned, was led by Alliance activists and supporters.

“Another exclusion was very significant in this situation. In the course of 1978, a major demonstration was organised against the nuclear reactor at Creys-Maleville. A section of the Lyon CFDT in Lyon-Gare, i. e. the postal workers who work in the trains, was excluded because it had participated in it. Many members of the opposition, and the entire Alliance syndicaliste, mobilized to oppose it, to no avail.

“Despite the appeals and the positions taken by many structures, it appeared on this occasion that the CFDT leadership would expel from its ranks all the militants of the extreme left who would express themselves in the Confederation. The absence of a union alternative was already felt at that time, i.e. the possibility of union organization after the exclusion.

“For example, the comrades of Lyon-Gare formed an

autonomous union, the “Syndicat autogestionnaire des travailleurs” (SAT) [*Self-Managing Union of Workers*]. Then, after a few years, part of the union joined the CNT. Which, at the time, was tiny. But the comrades felt the need to be confederated, to work with comrades from other industrial sectors. In an autonomous trade union, in a given sector, one or more workplaces, you run out of steam very quickly if you are not a fierce corporatist...

“We can see how the failure to build the CNT in the immediate post-war period could have had harmful consequences. If the anarcho-syndicalists, instead of arguing about various abstractions, had had the revolutionary consciousness to constitute a minimal trade union organization, and sufficiently known even to a few thousand members, they could have offered this recourse to all the combative unionists who were expelled from the major confederations after 1968.”³⁶

In the Paris suburbs, the Hauts-de-Seine and Val-de-Marne departmental unions were led by Alliance activists.

I do not mean to say that all the examples of libertarian or revolutionary syndicalist practice that could exist at the time in the CFDT were the responsibility of the Alliance; I only mean to say that the Alliance had an important activity, but that other practices could have taken place without its intervention. Other structures were run by libertarian militants, with no link to the Alliance. One day, as president of the temporary workers' union, I went to meet with officials from Union Locale Vitry (an industrialised sector South of Paris) because there were temporary workers in the big companies in the area (Rhône Poulenc) and we wanted to hold an awareness meeting. At the time, temporary workers were very poorly perceived by company employees and very little taken into account by trade unions. Union Locale Vitry was a very active one; we agreed to organize a meeting, and its leaders gave me a leaflet, “For a revolutionary union strategy”. They were anarcho-syndicalists ³⁷. Their Manifesto was absolutely anarcho-syndicalist.

I think that at the time there must have been many structures in the CFDT that, independently of the Alliance, had developed positions close to ours. Those of our comrades who participated in the congresses constantly met militants who, generally having no connection with the libertarian movement, developed positions close to anarcho-syndicalism. This

36 Jacky Toublet, interview with Franck Poupeau, J. Toublet archives.

37 I don't remember the date of the meeting, but it was after the 35th CFDT congress (May 1970).

fermentation, as it spread, became dangerous for the confederal leadership and it is this, I think, which led it to take repressive measures. In 1975, the ENO (Écoles normales ouvrières – Workers training schools) intended for the permanent apparatus, had as their theme: “Anarcho-syndicalism: how to fight it”. Exclusions from “contaminated” structures followed one another: 1976, Union Locale 8/9 Paris; 1977, Union Départementale Gironde, Lyon-Gare; 1978, Banque Nationale de Paris; 1979, Usinor-Dunkerque, the largest workers' section of the CFDT, etc.

A tremendous waste of activists.

The militants of the Communist League (trotskist), too happy to get rid of the anarchists, helped the confederal leadership well at the time³⁸.

It should be noted that the Alliance never imagined that the confederal CFDT leadership would “integrate” libertarian themes. The first articles of *Solidarité ouvrière*, our paper clearly show the total absence of any illusion on this issue.

At Renault in Billancourt, for example, there was a very active core of militants, one of whose leaders was an anarchist metallurgist, Jean-Pierre Graziani³⁹, militant of the Renault Anarchist Group and of the Anarchist Federation. Most of the group's militants were unionized with the CFDT and some were affiliated with the Alliance syndicaliste.

In addition to an important trade union activity, he led the Renault Cultural Group, which published texts and poems for the workers, including his own. The singer François Béranger, then a Renault employee, was one of them. We kept in touch for a while and then lost sight of each other. The problem, when groups of this type existed and when they were active, is that they often concentrated their activity at the level of their workplace or local union and it was extremely difficult to convince them of the need to organize themselves, as libertarians, at a broader level.

10.

Basism and assemblyism

The Alliance activists were either libertarian militants with solid trade union experience or militants from the trade union movement who rallied to our positions.

While we believed that decision-making power should be decentralized,

38 The policy of the Communist League consisted in occupying a maximum of permanent posts, mostly independently of their real implantation in terms of militants. This strategy made sense for people who saw themselves as an alternative leadership of the working class. That didn't prevent them from being part of the cartloads which were later excluded, after the Confederal leadership had got rid of the anarcho-syndicalists.

39 <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article154159>

that rotation of mandates should be promoted, that there should be freedom of debate, etc., we had no affinity with the militants who advocated permanent general assemblies and perpetual “grassroots power”. We were well aware that thousands of organized workers could not permanently debate what to do, as Proudhon had said before us.

If the assemblyist system is effective in times of struggle, it cannot be a permanent form of workers' organization. This has never been a position of revolutionary syndicalism. The permanent structures of the workers cannot be limited to a permanent basism. Trade union sections, trade unions, local and departmental unions operate on a daily basis and it is through these structures that workers are organized and educated to fight. They are also a major challenge for all apprentice leaders of the working class.

In fact, “assemblyism” and permanent “basism” is a very efficient way for a small number of activists to control a movement. From experience, we knew that there is nothing more manipulable than a general assembly, and that a small group of experienced activists can easily take control of a much larger group. *[Moreover, in a permanent assembly situation, there are those who have leisure time and can afford to stay and those who are obliged to earn a living, look after their children, etc. Those who stay, despite the “democratic” and “horizontalist” discourse, are in fact in the same situation as union bureaucrats. – Note added in 2022].*

It is amusing to note that a former militant of the “Cahiers de Mai”⁴⁰, of a councilist tendency, who became a union official at the CFDT federation of tertiary services, was trying, in the name of “basism”, to remove all power from the rank and file unions, which was an excellent way of avoiding any organised opposition. He was an excellent auxiliary of the “realignment” operated by the Confederal apparatus. This is why the Alliance sought to show workers all the methods by which self-proclaimed vanguards tried to gain access to the leadership of their class organizations. This was one of the main points we tried to develop in our training meetings.

The workers' class organization is a permanent organization, which has a function of grouping and reflection, which functions every day, which has well-defined modalities of functioning. The problem is not in the very principle of the existence of this organization, it is in the operating

40 “Les Cahiers de Mai” was a magazine created immediately after the events of May 68 and published until 1974. This bi-weekly popularised social reporting just after May '68. The aim of the publication was to establish links between the revolutionary workers' groups that existed, in a more or less constituted way, after May 1968, in many workplaces. The magazine's circulation fluctuated between 17,000 and 20,000 copies. The Cahiers de Mai were in favour of horizontal, grassroots links and was severely critical of the theory of the avant-garde and of class consciousness imported from outside.

modalities: is there or is there not mandate control, mandate rotation, etc.?

11.

On several occasions, we had reflected on the prospects of our activity and those of the libertarian movement in general. We knew that the Alliance was a form that was not intended to continue indefinitely. Other experiments were being carried out in parallel with ours.

There was the CNT(f), whose record at the time was not very positive for us. We thought that the activists of this organization, if they gave up their dogmatism, could have benefited from a space through which they could have developed, for instance in sectors that were not traditionally affected by unionisation and thus create a basis for further development. We also thought that the worsening crisis of trade unionism could one day lead activists to break out of traditional structures and create something else. This alternative structure could have been the CNT(f) if it had been able to create host structures in the meantime and abandon its rigid positions.

To some extent things evolved as we had expected: on the one hand the French CNT started to develop precisely in those sectors that were little unionised and neglected by the mainstream unions: hotels, cleaning, restaurants. On the other hand, the crisis of trade unionism has indeed pushed militants and entire structures to leave the mainstream organisations, but in the absence of a credible alternative they created something else: the SUD trade unions among which there were also many anarchists. (SUD for Solidarity, unity, democracy.)

In the 1970s, another interesting experience was that of committees of all kinds. Workers' activists left the trade union bodies and created grassroots committees in their workplaces and neighbourhoods. This movement was taking on a real dimension. The Alliance had established contacts with some of them. The activists of these committees wanted to create a movement outside all political parties. Our position was to keep in touch with them, without hiding our own views, but we were not trying to "recruit" them. We thought that through their practical experience they would eventually have come up with something similar to anarcho-syndicalism, if they had had the idea of federating – which they eventually didn't...

In summary, there were, in theory, three options:

- The Alliance that coordinated activity in the trade union movement;
- The CNT(f) which could have been an alternative to the traditional trade union movement;

- The grassroots committees that developed autonomous groups.

These three options were not mutually exclusive; they were tactics that responded to diverse needs in different contexts. With a certain naivety, no doubt, we thought at the time that with a minimum of imagination, they could have led to a form of unification.

However, Jacky Toublet shows how some activists abandoned the practice of “collectives” because they thought it led to a deadlock.

“On the occasion of two important strikes, that of the post office and that of the banks, around 1974, the most lucid friends – those I was talking about a moment ago – ended up noticing that the workers' collectives were of almost no use in the strikes; the decisions were taken in the unions. The strikes were started by the unions, managed by the unions, ended by the unions. No doubt, there was always something to be done in the workplaces and sorting centres, but nothing decisive...

“A debate in the ORA therefore started so as to change its position, i.e. to give up workers' collectives, which were anyway rapidly disappearing, and invest militants in the trade union movement. These debates, added to theoretical divisions – some spoke of a synthesis between Marxism-Leninism and anarchism or of a new concept called ‘anti-authoritarian dictatorship of the proletariat’ – led to a split⁴¹: on the one hand an organization called the “Organisation communiste libertaire”, OCL (Communist Libertarian Organization), which is now very weakened, and another which was called the UTCL⁴² (Union of

41 Toublet felt he had to add, on rereading his interview: “There were perhaps other, less theoretical causes for the split. Thus one of the protagonists of this split, whose name is all the less important because it must have been false, turned out to be the one who brought to the impasse Guéménée the premises of the Communist League which he had joined after the implosion of the ORA, the object which served as a formal pretext for the banning of this organisation. Some time later too, with two or three comrades, we went to the party which Lutte ouvrière (a Trotskyist organisation that was in competition with the Communist League) organised every year. We were surprised to see a former ORA militant, who had been in charge of international relations, cooking chips... And she was doing it so conscientiously that she did not see us waving at her! We concluded that the Ministry of the Interior and Lutte ouvrière, and perhaps others, had made a deal at the expense of the ORA, an organisation whose development was bothering them!”

42 Union des travailleurs communistes libertaires (Union of libertarian communist workers), one of the two groups resulting from the split of the ORA which, by

Communist Libertarian Workers) on the new orientation.” “The future militants of Alternative Libertaine (Spadoni, Renard, Cellier) then tried to bring about rapprochements.

“Misunderstandings among many anarchosindicalists about the evolution of these comrades, and perhaps a generational problem, explain why the Alliance and the UTCL did not merge – and we can perhaps, today, regret it ⁴³ ...

“Since those years, however, we have managed to do things together. In support of the anti-Franco fight, for example, when Puig-Antich was garroted or two Basque militants, Garmendia and Otaegui, were murdered.”

Around 1977, attempts were made to bring the Alliance and the UTCL closer together, but they did not succeed⁴⁴. Jacky Toublet comments:

12.

I would like to come back to the above-mentioned brochure, “La CFDT et le syndicalisme révolutionnaire”. Its author makes several errors of appreciation ⁴⁵, regarding the “Coordination nationale anarcho-sindicaliste” (national anarcho-sindicalist coordination).

There was never any question of providing for representations of union structures such as CFDT, FO or CGT, etc. as such. The absence of “CFDT unions” at this conference was therefore absolutely not due to the “too marked anarchist character of the CNAS” since, in any case, the CFDT structures that had a “SR” (revolutionary syndicalist) activity were usually led by Alliance militants. The Sotteville [a suburb of Rouen, in Normandy] conference did not have this objective, simply because this would have been tantamount to designating these structures for repression. The author of the

regrouping with others, constituted Alternative libertaine.

43 On this last point, Jacky's memory is a bit selective. At the time when discussions were taking place between the Alliance and the UTCL, he was the first to be completely appalled by the attitude and the discourse of the UTCL, dogmatic, brittle and pretentious. And above all by their implausible alignment with the positions of the Communist League. At the end of this conference held by the two groups in the 19th arrondissement of Paris, a group of female activists from the UTCL went to see female activists from the Alliance to rejoice that the latter had refused to consider a merger, because the guys from the UTCL were convinced that they would “swallow alive” the Alliance... (I only learned this last detail in a late confidence, in February 2006).

44 See: “Octobre 1977: Conférence nationale des travailleurs libertaires”, <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?rubrique65>

45 In vol. 3, page 91.

brochure would like to convince himself that if the “SR” current had not been polluted by anarchists, things would have turned out better. This is not the case. Had it not been for the anarcho-syndicalists grouped in the Alliance, the author of the brochure would not have had much to say about revolutionary syndicalist activity in the CFDT. The only instances of the CFDT mentioned by the author of the brochure are those where there were Alliance activists, or instances where activists were close to the Alliance.

It is also wrong to say that the revolutionary syndicalists “still refuse to structure themselves as a tendency within the confederations”. This was precisely the role of the Alliance. However, there was a misunderstanding:

10 H CONTRE la REPRESSION des TRAVAILLEURS
dans les PAYS DE L'EST et en AMERIQUE LATINE
SAMEDI 10 nov. 14 a 24 h | **AMPHI 3 FAC/ LETTRE MT ST AIGNAN**

MEETING débats
roumanie urss
tchecoslovaquie
pologne
bulgarie
cuba
chili
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Organizing to spread our positions, making propaganda, bringing together activists, etc., yes. That's what we were doing. But we were categorically opposed to the basis of trade union organisation being founded on the principle of representation by tendencies, because this meant introducing into the trade union movement parliamentary practices: 25% of votes for tendency A, 32% of votes for tendency B, etc.). It's not the same thing at all. There is, in *Solidarité ouvrière*, a very explicit critical article on this subject, about the tendencies in the Fédération de l'Éducation nationale⁴⁶.

46 The existence of tendencies in the trade union organisation forced militants “to discuss political options stemming from this or that party, rather than the means to be implemented against capitalism and the state”. (*Solidarité ouvrière* n° 33,

In practice, when the author of the brochure refers to revolutionary syndicalism in general, he evokes a current with vague outlines without us knowing what it contains, but in which it would be better if there weren't too many anarchists. But when he talks about the SR current in the CFDT and gives concrete examples, he always refers to the Alliance.

It is quite true to say that the Alliance appeared “as much as a specific, political organization as a trade union structure”. We had (somewhat by force of circumstance and independently of our will, in fact) become a kind of political organization, quite special however, which developed in the trade union movement the idea that workers should take things in hand, that inter-professional activity should be developed and that all the problems of society should be dealt with by the class organization, which was not quite the same perspective as that of the Trotskists.

If some militants of dissolved structures or expelled from the CFDT did not join us, it is not because we were libertarians, it is because they themselves had other projects. Let us remember that libertarians are not the only ones who had been excluded. Many militants excluded from the CFDT, including many libertarians, are now in SUD. The question: why are they not at the CNT(f)? finds its answer in the CNT's behaviour at the time.

As for the “anarcho-syndicalist movement of Force ouvrière led by Alexandre Hébert”, we had cut off all contact with it for several reasons: because it had become clear to us that this “anarcho-syndicalist movement” was being manipulated by the lambertists (we suspected that Alexandre Hébert was part of the political bureau of the Organisation communiste internationaliste, IVth International), and that the FO militants seemed to be taking a little too much sides with their confederate leadership, in other words, that they were subject to “Confederal patriotism”. The comrades of FO blamed the Alliance comrades for militating in the CFDT. They were absolutely obsessed with the fact that the leadership of this confederation was in the hands of clerics. The anticlericalism of our FO's comrades eventually became tiresome, not because it was not justified, but because it was obsessive. The comrades of the CFDT did not deny that the leadership of the confederation to which they had joined was influenced by the social doctrine of the Church. But at the level where they were militating, it didn't matter much. In the lower strata of the organization, the comrades were perfectly equipped to deal with the slightest intrusion of clericalism, and Pope Pius IX's Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* was totally unknown. Besides the Alliance had no intention to take over the leadership of the CFDT.

13.

On the question of the inter-professional, or what we called the “horizontal structure”.

The development of activity in horizontal structures – local unions⁴⁷ and departmental unions – has been an extraordinary experience. We argued that the trade union, or any similar structure, organising workers on the basis of their role in the production process (on the workplace) should also organise them in geographical structures, the location of their company.

These geographical structures existed, but their role was, in our opinion, artificially reduced. They could not only be responsible for coordinating the industrial action of the companies located in the locality, but also for dealing with all issues affecting the lives of workers. The horizontal structures were therefore charged with a real political activity: there was no longer a need for parties. All this was not original: it had already been described by Bakunin and put into practice in France even before the constitution of the CGT with the “bourses du travail” (Labour exchanges).

The local unions were developing, they were becoming a real pole of organization of workers on a geographical basis. The activists who were formally members of the Alliance were few in number compared to those who were attracted by the practices they proposed. We were not trying to “recruit” at all costs. Activists who eventually gained some experience naturally ended up joining.

The grass was cut under the feet of all the leftist groups competing for the title of alternative leadership of the working class. This was unacceptable to them. The liquidation of this experiment, which did not have time to develop sufficiently to resist the attacks, was extremely brutal, and it was carried out with the active complicity of these leftist groups and in particular of the Communist League. However, the experiment was conducted for several years on a scale that was not negligible, and it worked. Workers were attracted to this type of activity and the structures that carried it out were developing. This is a measure of the political waste caused on the one hand by the parliamentary left and far left, but also by the lack of involvement of a part of the anarchist movement.

14.

The transition of some Alliance militants to the Anarchist Federation. I said that when the Alliance was set up, our reference text was the Amiens Charter, we gradually came to question it and refer to another charter, the

47 What we call in France “union locale” or “union départementale” (a “département” is roughly speaking the administrative equivalent to a county) is not strictly speaking one union but the grouping of all the unions present in a given geographical area.

Lyon Charter. I would like to expand on this point.

The relegation of the Amiens Charter to the antiquities store was the result of a very simple observation: in 1906 there was only one trade union organisation and there was then a myth of the unity of the workers' movement. The working class had to be united against the bosses. It was something that couldn't even be discussed.

In 1970, there were many confederations: the CGT controlled by the communists, the CFDT controlled by the social democrats, FO controlled by God knows what, etc.

The unity of the workers' movement no longer made sense. And brandishing the Amiens Charter under the noses of the leaders of all these confederations and claiming trade union independence no longer made sense either. We had to find something else. The workers' movement was colonized by parties that used it as a mass of manoeuvre in their political strategies. Asking them to apply the principles of Amiens was like asking a crocodile to become a vegetarian.

This is where the second observation we made comes in.

Revolutionary syndicalism in the French sense of the term, had gone bankrupt at the time of the Russian revolution, which had introduced into the labour movement in France new practices to which our comrades had not been able to adapt and which they had not been able to counter. In short, they failed to find a viable alternative⁴⁸. There was no turning back. To persist in referring to the Charter of Amiens was to sigh after a more or less idyllic but completely outdated order.

• **Avant-garde and active minority.** In the tradition of French trade unionism, the cult of unity played a considerable role, although very different tendencies could come up against each other at congresses. Beyond the multiple options that could arise, the main opposition was between those who intended to involve the working class in parliamentary action and those who opposed it. The Amiens Charter, in 1906, is a compromise text of different tendencies united against Guesdism⁴⁹, in which everyone can find their way, but the notion of union neutrality that emerges

48 Referring to the conflict between revolutionary syndicalists and communists within the CGT-U, Pierre Besnard wrote: "Despite the incredible efforts of the syndicalists, whose homogeneity was not the dominant virtue, the communists triumphed definitively. (...) If the revolutionary syndicalist groupings had been more active, if they had known where they were going, it is possible that the crushing would have been less brutal and that a reaction would have become possible. This was not the case." Pierre Besnard, article "CGT" de *l'Encyclopédie anarchiste*. <http://www.fondation-besnard.org/spip.php?article287>

49 See note 10.

from it can be interpreted as an affirmation of non-intervention on the political field, which is appropriate for those who support parliamentary action, while for revolutionary syndicalists it meant that trade unionism, without excluding political action (politics is not limited to elections...), is not committed to parliamentary action. For Pouget, the CGT is “politically neutral”, but this asserted neutrality “does not imply abdication or indifference in the face of general, social problems (...) The Confederation does not abdicate before any social or political problem (by giving this word its broad meaning).” (*La CGT*).

In an organization with several hundred thousand members, in which a current favourable to parliamentary action and an opposing current constantly clashed, on what could the “unity” be based? In the best case, depending on the fluctuations of trade union democracy, the organization's leadership could have a mandate to develop one or the other strategy. It didn't make sense.

It was difficult to prevent supporters of the electoral strategy and those who sought above all to reach an agreement with the public authorities and employers from developing their theses and practices. The split was inevitable.

Pierre Besnard explicitly states that the *de facto* abandonment of class struggle in the CGT literally created a tendency that could no longer group together “workers who were aware of the struggle to be waged for the disappearance of employers and employees. Some of them were ideologically, morally excluded”. This, he said, was the cause of the 1921 split that gave rise to the CGTU. The latter should not be different: the revolutionary role of trade unionism, its independence, its functional autonomy and its capacity for action should be denied by the Communist Party, which wanted to make it a transmission belt. From then on, a second split, “already in germination at the time of the first, occurred”. It was the constitution, in 1926, of the CGT-Syndicaliste révolutionnaire.

The same problem that had divided the IWA thus reappeared: the opposition between those who advocated the strategy of conquering political power through elections and those who wanted to conquer social power. The Russian Revolution was to change the nature of the problem significantly. Many revolutionary syndicaliste would support it, but this support can only be explained by the context. The particular character of the early revolution, as well as the remoteness, made many militants convinced that the Bolsheviks were Bakuninians⁵⁰. Some confusion reigned for some time, since shortly after Monatte's arrest on May 3, 1920, for conspiracy

50 This fact was revealed to me by activists who lived through this period, notably Gaston Leval.

against State security. Besides, the police arrested leaders of a “Federation of Soviets” and a “Communist Party”, both of which were anarchist!

Many Bolsheviks themselves, after Lenin had imposed the April theses on the Bolsheviks, which went completely against the party's traditional positions, believed that their leader had become Bakuninian. Thus, Goldberg, an old friend of Lenin, wrote: “The place left vacant by the great anarchist Bakunin is once again occupied. What we have just heard is the formal negation of social democratic doctrine and the whole theory of scientific Marxism. This is the most obvious apology for anarchism⁵¹.” Indeed, the Bolsheviks were only able to take power because they had abandoned their usual slogans and adopted the eminently anarchist slogan of “All power to the Soviets!”

Revolutionary syndicalists will contribute to the formation of the Communist Party in France. Monatte, Rosmer and Delagarde were excluded in December 1924. It is important to bear in mind a fact that has been little emphasized: for many, the Russian revolution was the prelude to the extension of the revolution in Europe. From this perspective, supporting the Russian revolution, whatever its character, was vital. “The revolution will soon cease to be Russian and become European,” wrote Monatte to Trotsky on March 13, 1920. Tom Mann, a British revolutionary syndicalist (and founder of the British Communist Party in 1921), made it clear: “Bolshevism, Spartakism, revolutionary syndicalism, all this means the same thing under different names.” Many revolutionary syndicalist activists saw no difference between the soviets and the labour exchanges, which in fact served the same purpose: to bring together workers, and by extension the working population of a locality.

In addition to anti-parliamentarism⁵², there were many similarities between the positions of revolutionary syndicalism and those of the Bolsheviks, which explain why some activists embraced communism. These similarities will be highlighted above all by the Bolsheviks themselves, anxious to attract the most active workers' militants. Charbit, Hasfeld, Martinet, Monatte, Monmousseau, Rosmer, Sémard and others were among them. To say, with Brupbacher, that revolutionary syndicalism accomplishes its suicide is exaggerated. If these activists have lacked discernment, this is something that is difficult to blame them for. However, this lack of discernment was not inevitable: Gaston Leval went to Moscow in 1921 as deputy delegate of the Spanish CNT to take part in the constituent congress of the Red International of Labour Unions. What he saw in Russia – it is true that he did not just follow the official signposts –

51 David Shub, *Lénine*, Idées-Gallimard, p. 173.

52 Lenin complained that the anti-parliamentary struggle had been abandoned to the anarchists.

persuaded him that the revolution is moving towards a party dictatorship⁵³. The report he made to the Zaragoza Congress in 1922, added to the one Angel Pestana had made, persuaded the CNT not to join the Red International of Labour Unions, thus avoiding the process of "Bolshevizing" suffered by other European trade union centres. The second IWA was constituted In 1922 in competition with the Red Trade Union International.

It can be said that it is the acceleration of history that has forced the various currents present in the labour movement to stand out clearly. While

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(Organe syndicaliste révolutionnaire et anarchosindicaliste d'expression française)

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EDITORIAL :

GROGNE
DE LA POLICE
OU
MALAISE
DE LA SOCIETE ?

RENAULT :

LUTTE DE CLASSES
ET COMBAT CULTUREL

C'est avec un étonnement amusi que les militants ouvriers ont suivi le conseil des policiers en uniforme pour leur ministre. On connaît les faits, ils ont été relatés abondamment par la grande presse, et surtout que l'aspect anecdotique — et banal — de l'affaire, intéressamment aux causes et aux conséquences de cet affrontement.

Quelle a d'abord été la réaction des forces de « l'opposition » ? On pourrait la résumer par « avec nous au mouvement », ou même le policier gratuit... », agissant de quelque manière. Car il s'agit de garder et de ses collègues, ou même garanti de la même manière ou même en uniforme qui protège les petits enfants traversant les rues à la suite de l'école, ou jeune au regard sans borne — voire sans origine — cette malheureuse autoguidé qui évite les crises des leaders pour ne choisir que ceux des hypocrites mensurs, enfin ce retour du corps de la police au sein de la communauté nationale avec les fluctuations du jour — et une petite promotion — c'est ce qui nos grands hommes des forces de l'administration constructive son-



UN ASPECT POSITIF :

LA RELATION
USINE-QUARTIER

L'objet du groupe initiallement, dans la dimension d'un dialogue de Châteaufort sur une 18 (disque n° 1). Deux autres éléments de nature sur pied un comité de diffusion (appelé par le mot C.A.C.P.R.) pour centraliser la diffusion des disques et brochures au niveau de leur département. L'impact créé dans le milieu ouvrier par la diffusion en masse du disque n° 1 appelé peu à peu les comités de contrôle à un rythme mesuré qui dépassa sans éclatement le cadre de leur seul département.

En janvier 1971, le C.A.C.P.R. groupa une quarantaine de copies, pour la plupart militantes de la C.P.D.T. : les comités inter-départementaux de travail plus précis, les comités locaux plus mesurés à l'initiative avec d'autres entreprises, ainsi qu'au niveau d'un quartier avec le groupe de S.C., cette dernière relation s'avérera positive dans l'avenir au niveau des échanges et de communication entre des militants ouvriers et non-ouvriers.

it is regrettable that revolutionary syndicalism did not maintain their dominant position in France, at the international level the situation was very encouraging: the IWA had sections in 24 countries and brought together several million workers.

The rapprochement between the concept of active minority and that of avant-garde has been largely made by the Leninists who were concerned to bring the two movements closer together. Let us recall some ideas developed by Pouget on the issue of active minorities.

53 He met Rosmer, Victor Serge, Marcel Body, Voline (whom he had released from prison under incredible circumstances), Alexandre Schapiro, Emma Goldmann, Alexandre Berckmann, but also, on the Bolshevik side, Chliapnikoff, Alexandra Kollontaï, Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin.

To counterbalance the strength of the possessing class we need another strength: “this strength, it is up to the conscious workers to materialize it; (...) this necessary need for revolutionary cohesion is realized within the trade union organization: there, a growing minority is constituted and developed which aims to acquire enough power to counterbalance first and then annihilate the forces of exploitation and oppression.” (Pouget, *Direct Action*)

Those who remain outside the trade union organization, who refuse to fight are “human zeroes”, “inert beings whose latent forces only enter into action under the shock imposed on them by the energetic and the audacious”. (*The Basics of Trade Unionism.*) There is a total lack of complacency towards unorganized workers: “Majorities are sheepish and unconscious. They accept the facts as established and suffer the worst mistakes. If they sometimes have a few moments of lucidity, it is under the impulse of revolutionary minorities and it is not uncommon that after taking a step forward, they passively let the old regime and the overthrown institutions be reconstituted.”⁵⁴

“The whole revolutionary problem consists in this: to constitute a minority strong enough to overthrow the ruling minority” (...) “Who then makes the propaganda, who then draws up the programs of demands? Minorities! Minorities! Only minorities!” (*Père Peinard*, 12/01/1890)

But these minorities must be as numerous as possible, “for if we are convinced that the revolution will be the work of a minority, we still want this minority to be as numerous as possible, so that the chances of success are greater.”

It is clear that, in the eyes of revolutionary syndicalists, differences in the level of consciousness exist in the working class. The militants do not expect everyone to adhere to the idea of proletarian revolution, but they believe that the active minority can create, when the time comes, a training phenomenon and bring the great mass of the proletariat to move. Bakunin thought that “in times of great political or economic crises (...), ten, twenty or thirty men who are well heard and well organized among themselves, and who know where they are going and what they want, will easily bring about a hundred, two hundred, three hundred or even more”. But, he specifies, “so that the tenth part of the proletariat (...) can lead the other nine tenths”, it is necessary that each member is organized, conscious of the goal to be reached, that he knows the principles of the International and the means to

54 “Grève générale réformiste et grève générale révolutionnaire.” (Reformist general strike and revolutionary general strike.)

achieve them. This is not about spontaneity... “Only then can he effectively fulfil the mission of propagandist (...) in times of peace and calm, and in times of struggle that of a revolutionary leader.” (“Protest of the Alliance”). The role of the active minority had been perfectly defined by Bakunin.

The existence of an active minority, capable of catalysing the action of the masses, depended, however, in the CGT at the beginning of the century, on a number of institutional conditions on which reformists and revolutionaries were opposed. This is the very concrete and significant problem of proportional representation. The syndicalists were in favour of equality of votes per union, regardless of their number. The application of the principle of proportional representation, which establishes the hegemony of a few large unions, effectively condemns the revolutionary minority.

“The approval of proportional representation would have implied the negation of the whole trade union work which is the result of the revolutionary action of minorities. Now, if we accept that the majority is authentic, at what point will we stop? On this soapy slope you risk being dragged away. Can it only be that, on the pretext of proportionality, a majority of unconscious people deny the right to strike to a minority of conscious militants? And by virtue of what criteria will we oppose this mass alone if, ourselves, we have decreased the effective action of minorities by suffocating them under proportionality?” (Declaration of Pouget at the Montpellier Congress, September 1902.)

The democratic principle is therefore not claimed at all. Again, this is the introduction into trade union practice of an original element of law. The democratic principle implies that each individual represents one vote, and that the majority of votes wins the decision, i.e. 50.5% can be right on 49.5%. The rejection of this democratic principle comes partly from the anarchist movement, for which decisions must be taken with the broadest possible consensus. But there is something else. This is a different conception of legitimacy. The basic unit is not the individual but the organized individual. Its organization is the union. This is the basic unit. Within the union, one member is worth another. This is a logic that is difficult to understand because it contrasts singularly with our conditioning on formal democracy.

The democratic principle is foreign to trade unionism. Moreover, only a minority of workers are unionized, so “the unwillingness of the unconscious and non-unionized majority would paralyze any action”. The minority must

therefore “act without taking into account the refractory mass”. Moreover, Pouget points out, the majority is ill-advised to recriminate, since “all workers, interested in the action, although not participating in it in any way, are called upon to benefit from the results achieved”... Thus, “it is not taken into account the mass that refuses to act, and only the conscious are called upon to decide and act” (*Le Mouvement socialiste*, January 1907).

“In the crucible of the economic struggle, the fusion of political elements is achieved and a living unity is obtained that erects trade unionism as a power of revolutionary coordination.” (*Le mouvement socialiste*, January 1907.)

It is therefore understandable that the Leninists tried to rally the revolutionary syndicalists to their cause, although for the former the vanguard was made up of professional revolutionaries, most of the time not workers, while for the latter the active minority was immersed in the working class of which it was a part.

Trotsky was right about that. He understood that the control of the trade union movement was a decisive step in influencing the labour movement. While revolutionary syndicalism was right to fight for trade union autonomy against the bourgeois government and parliamentary socialists, it did not “fetishize the autonomy of mass organizations. On the contrary, he understood and advocated the leading role of the revolutionary minority in mass organizations, which reflect within them the entire working class, with all its contradictions, backwardness, and weaknesses.” In short, there is no longer any reason for autonomy now that there is a real revolutionary party.

And Trotsky adds:

“4. The theory of the active minority was, in essence, an incomplete theory of a proletarian party. In all its practice, revolutionary syndicalism was an embryo of a revolutionary party as against opportunism, that is, it was a remarkable draft outline of revolutionary Communism.

“5. The weakness of anarcho-syndicalism, even in its classic period, was the absence of a correct theoretical foundation, and, as a result a wrong understanding of the nature of the state and its role in the class struggle; an incomplete, not fully developed and, consequently, a wrong conception of the role of the revolutionary minority, that is, the party. Thence the mistakes in tactics, such as the fetishism of the general strike, the ignoring of the connection between the uprising and the seizure of power, etc.

“6. After the war, French syndicalism found not only its

refutation but also its development and its completion in Communism. Attempts to revive revolutionary syndicalism now would be to try and turn back history. For the labour movement, such attempts can have only reactionary significance.”⁵⁵

The idea that trade unions are self-sufficient means “the dissolution of the revolutionary vanguard into the backward masses, that is, the trade unions.”⁵⁶

Criticisms of revolutionary syndicalism had already provoked reactions, but not in the direction Trotsky had hoped for. After the murder of trade unionists by communists at the Maison des syndicats in Paris on 11 January 1924, anarcho-syndicalists and revolutionary syndicalists decided the formation of a new trade union centre, the CGT-SR. The departmental unions of the Somme, Gironde, Yonne, Rhône, the building federation, grouped together in a federative union of autonomous trade unions in France, then confederated on 1 and 2 November 1926 in Lyon.

The new organisation challenges the idea of trade union neutrality as affirmed in the Amiens Charter, in particular the paragraph where “the Congress asserts the complete freedom for union member to participate — outside of his corporate grouping — in those forms of struggle that correspond to his philosophical or political concepts, limiting itself to asking him in exchange to not introduce into the union the opinions he professes outside it”.

The CGT-SR's constitutional documents offer a real reflection on the context of the time, particularly on the looming global crisis, on the rise of fascism, and formulate a real political programme.

A revolutionary tactic is outlined concerning the relationship with other revolutionary forces, both in daily protest action and in the event of a revolution. A programme of demands is proposed, which is part of both daily demands and a preparation for social transformation. Curiously, we will find the main themes, obviously readjusted, of this program in... Trotsky's transition program, ten years later!

Concerning this period, A. Schapiro wrote in 1937:

“The Great War swept away the Charter of trade union neutrality. And the split inside the First International between Marx and Bakunin [Volume One, Chapter 6] was echoed —

55 Trotsky, “Communism and syndicalism”, 1929.

56 *Ibid.*.

nearly a half-century later — in the inevitable historic split in the post-war international workers' movement.

To counter the policy of subordinating the workers' movement to the conveniences of the so-called “workers” political parties, a new movement founded *upon mass direct action*, outside of and against all political parties, rose from the still smoking embers of the 1914-1918 war. Anarcho-syndicalism made a reality of the only confluence of forces and personnel capable of guaranteeing the worker and peasant class its complete independence and its inalienable right to revolutionary initiative in *all of the manifestations* of an unrelenting struggle against capitalism and State, and the rebuilding of a libertarian social life upon the ruins of outmoded regimes.⁵⁷”

The constitution of the CGT-SR obviously did not lead to a spectacular breakthrough in the class struggle of the time. It was a small organization formed too late as the myth of the Russian revolution began to emerge. One can hardly blame a few lucid activists for not having succeeded in persuading the masses to swim against the current. We must also keep in mind that we are entering at this time the period of the rise of fascism which was in power in Italy and Portugal, and a few years later in Germany. In these three countries there were significant anarcho-syndicalist movements that were swept away, along with the rest of the workers' movement.

• International questions

The Alliance did not neglect the question of international relations at all. Breaking with the Third Worldism of the leftist groups, we thought it essential that our movement develop in the centres of imperialism: the United States and Britain. We had contacts with libertarian groups in English-speaking countries but these never lasted very long and there was never anything lasting. The same thing happened in Germany. In fact, the day-to-day practices of the various libertarian organisations around the world, and the social strata involved, seemed to vary so much that no overall vision of activity seemed possible.

For the Trotskyist organisations, things were simpler: there was the dogmatic and pre-established vision of the party – a “kit”, in short – whose functions were theoretically the same everywhere, applicable in all circumstances; there was an equally dogmatic and pre-established vision of

57 Introduction to Pierre Besnard's report on “Anarcho-Syndicalism and Anarchism” (1937) International Anarchist Congress, 1937. <https://libcom.org/article/introduction-pierre-besnards-anarcho-syndicalism-and-anarchism-alexander-schapiro>

the “International”. It was enough to apply the recipes. Insofar as the libertarians did not start from a pre-established plan but from the reality of their daily lives, and this reality was too varied and fluctuating, it is understandable that it was not possible to establish lasting relations.

We also supported the Portuguese CGT. The fascist Salazar had taken power in 1926. The CGT, a sister organisation of the Spanish CNT, was then crushed. It rebuilt itself after the fall of the regime. Again, Jacky and I went to meet the comrades in this country. They tried to rebuild the organization after the fall of the regime, but 50 years of fascism had broken the momentum. We met the survivors of this period and were impressed by the incredibly powerful personalities of these comrades, among whom I would mention Emidio Santana and Ligia de Oliveira.

In Sweden, we were very close to the syndicalist organisation Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation (SAC). The SAC was not an “alternative union”, it explicitly claimed to be anarcho-syndicalist and had 25,000 members. Like us, they actively supported the CNT from within and had close links with Frente libertario. It was in this capacity that we established permanent and very close relations with them. No SAC activist going to Paris would fail to visit us. Some comrades of the Alliance, such as Thierry Porré, who had lived in Sweden and spoke the language, had friendships with members of the SAC leadership. The SAC, Frente Libertario and the Alliance were naturally linked by the support to the CNT in Spain.

The only libertarian movement with which the militants of the Alliance established lasting relations, even after the dissolution of the latter, was obviously Spain, and to a lesser degree Portugal.

• **Some lessons from the past**

The anarcho-syndicalist and revolutionary syndicalist themes have a hard life. As early as 1921, Trotsky warned that it was necessary to “severely condemn the conduct of certain communists who not only did not fight in the unions for the influence of the Party, but were opposed to action in this direction in the name of a false interpretation of union autonomy”. At the same time, faced with the serious problems of economic reorganization that they had not foreseen of at all, the Bolshevik leaders were offered by Chliapnikov and Kollontai, who had formed a tendency, the Workers Opposition, to entrust the management of the economy to a Congress of Russian producers, grouped into production unions that would elect a central body to govern the entire national economy of the Republic. This idea was condemned as an “anarchist and trade unionist deviation”. The Workers' Opposition was muzzled at the Xth Party Congress in 1921, and Trotsky said of it: “They put forward dangerous slogans... they placed the right of workers to elect their representatives above the party. As if the party

had no right to assert its dictatorship, even if this dictatorship was in conflict with the changing moods of workers democracy...”

The ghost of syndicalism constantly glides over the French working class. In the 1930s, the leadership of the French Communist Party was constantly forced to reprimand factory militants who did not strictly apply party discipline and who intended to become autonomous in relation to it. While the parliamentary left signed a “Programme Commun de Gouvernement”⁵⁸, Edmond Maire, general secretary of the CFDT stated: “There have been two major socialist currents, the Jacobin, centralizing, authoritarian one, has established itself in the countries of the East. The other, anarcho-syndicalist, self-managing libertarian socialism, is the one we represent.” (*Le Monde*, October 19, 1972.) Edmond Maire’s statement, which were perfectly opportunistic, it goes without saying, on the proximity of the CFDT to anarcho-syndicalism, was clearly an attempt to integrate this confederation into the historical legitimacy of the French labour movement.

Thus anarcho-syndicalism serves as a repellent when one wants to tighten control over the organization, but it serves as a reference when one wants to reaffirm continuity with the French workers movement. It goes without saying that Edmond Maire did not mean a word of what he said. Indeed, at the time he made this statement, a process of “cleaning up” was beginning within the trade union bodies in which the anarcho-syndicalists had successfully developed their views. The years following 1968 saw an extraordinary development of the trade union movement in France, largely due to the expansion of inter-professional structures. This phenomenon has made it possible to considerably broaden the scope of the trade union organisation’s intervention, since in local and departmental unions (labour exchanges) it was possible to deal with problems that went well beyond the workplace. It has also allowed for decentralized coordination of action, increased debate in grassroots and intermediate structures. This process was clearly perceived by the trade union apparatuses, but also by the left-wing and far-left parties, as a danger. Indeed, the development of political debate and organizational work in class structures that were not confined to the workplace and that developed themes of reflection that went far beyond simple economic demands, constituted a challenge to the role of self-proclaimed vanguards. Also, one of the tasks that the trade union leaders subsequently set for themselves, with the complicity of the Trotskyists, was

58 “Common Government Programme”: a reform programme, adopted on 27 June 1972 by the Socialist Party, the French Communist Party and signed on 12 July 1972 and some Left Radicals. It foresaw a great upheaval in the economic, political and military fields in France. It lasted until 1977.

to laminate this movement by dissolving trade union sections, trade unions, local and departmental unions, and excluding militants.

The historical experience of social democracy and Leninism has disqualified these two movements in their attempts to offer an alternative to capitalism. The debate remains open on the question of how anarcho-syndicalists should intervene today.

Is there a possibility today for anarcho-syndicalism to develop? It is certain that the significant reappearance of this movement on the field of class struggle cannot be achieved by mechanically taking up the problems as they were posed a hundred years ago. Above all, it is necessary to avoid any apologetic attitude aimed at justifying everything under the pretext of presenting an idyllic image of the movement.

Strictly speaking, there was no doctrine of revolutionary syndicalism until it has been made explicit by the CGT-SR. Theory, for activists, remains secondary. Georges Sorel, known as a theoretician of revolutionary syndicalism, was completely unknown to the militants. Moreover, he theorized revolutionary syndicalism in the name of Marxism: from his point of view, revolutionary syndicalism was a revision of official socialism and a return to true Marxism. “There is no better proof, he said, to demonstrate Marx's genius than the remarkable concordance that exists between the views and doctrine that revolutionary syndicalism is building today, slowly, with difficulty, always standing on the ground of strike practice.”⁵⁹ After Fernand Pelloutier's “Letter to the Anarchists”, many activists will follow the call, but it constituted a disparate set. Some evolved towards “pure trade unionism”, others remained anarchists acting in trade unions. Most of the revolutionary syndicalist activists were anarchist trade unionists, socialist trade unionists. The very term revolutionary syndicalism covers different realities. There are revolutionary trade union movements, but not really a doctrine, apart from the notion of trade union independence.

But the notion of trade union independence has a defensive aspect, it also implies that the protagonists “play the game”. When a structured and disciplined party decides not to play the game, independence inevitably disappears. Thus, the Communist Party was able to “penetrate the CGT like a piece of steel in a clod of butter” in the very words of one of its leaders. The notion of independence, when it is not based on an independent doctrine, on a coherent organization that replaces external doctrines and organizations, is only a wishful thinking. Revolutionary syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalists were unable to cope with the penetration of Bolshevik fractions into the unions.

59 Georges Sorel, *Réflexions sur la violence*.

Trotsky was absolutely right to say that the theory of the active minority was an “incomplete” theory and that revolutionary syndicalism was something “embryonic”. However, the solution did not lie in aligning with Lenin's positions but in asserting the identity of revolutionary syndicalism more clearly, which should have assumed its full function as a revolutionary minority by organizing itself *as such* in the CGT to combat external penetration. To counter the communist faction in the CGT, it would have been necessary to constitute a revolutionary syndicalist counter-fraction. The response to the actions of a fraction is the unveiling of its projects, but unfortunately this is only possible by the creation of a counter-fraction.

Unfortunately, such practices were culturally inconceivable to our comrades at the time.

If the revolutionary syndicalists in the former CGT had organized themselves as such instead of being scattered, the confederation might not have been “Bolshevized” and its best militants would not have founded the Communist Party. When revolutionary syndicalism was definitively constituted with the CGT-SR, the term “revolutionary syndicalism” no longer had the same content as twenty years earlier. It is in fact anarcho-syndicalism, although Pierre Besnard has always declared himself a revolutionary syndicalist. The myth of working class unity in a single organization has been abandoned. Implicitly, we have assimilated the idea (that no one dares to formulate) that the larger the organization, the less radical its mode of action and its program are. The movement resigned itself to being an organized revolutionary minority whose function was no longer to bring together the entire working class, but to promote actions likely to lead the masses (the objective being to be as numerous as possible), and to draw up a programme for the reorganization of society. In this sense, French revolutionary syndicalism is largely in line with Leninian practices, with the notable difference that its field of intervention, trade unionism, is located on the class field, and not on the inter-classist and party field.

The CGT-SR marks the true birth of anarcho-syndicalism as an independent and affirmative doctrine of its own. The creation of the CGT-SR in France was an adequate, but late, response to a situation that the militants had not been able to foresee, namely the emergence, in the field of social and political struggle, within the labour movement and its organizations, of unknown and effective methods of infiltration, nucleation and takeover. The fact that these methods could have been implemented so effectively obviously leads to the question: were the revolutionary syndicalist leaders up to the task, and would this not in some way have been a crisis of the leadership of the workers' movement? This is forgetting the extraordinary impact of the Russian revolution. The Bolshevism of the trade

union movement was only possible with the active collaboration, at least in the beginning, of revolutionary syndicalists such as Monatte, who played the role of a Trojan horse in the labour movement.

Anarcho-syndicalism is not a movement without doctrine. It is to a large extent a return to Bakuninian principles. An important force between the two wars, its disappearance from the international scene was not so much due to its inability to adapt to the evolution of capitalist society as to its physical extermination by fascism and Stalinism.

* * * * *

In conclusion, should we draw a balance sheet of the Alliance's failure? Of course not, of course not. The dissolution of our group was a hard blow at the time, because it was the end of a dream, it was a project that was fading away. Ten years of hyperactivity, fighting, fraternity, friendliness and, it must be said, frank laughter, because we had such a great time. The assessment of a group like ours is not only based on its political results but also on the way it lived its activism⁶⁰.

Perhaps this is due to its short life, but the Alliance has never been torn apart by internal conflicts. Strong disagreements are normal, but they didn't go far. There is still something undefinable between the Alliance elders who meet today, even with those who have dropped out of the action. We all long for that time, but no one stayed on the side of the road and mourned.

The transition of some of the Alliance's Parisian militants to the Anarchist Federation was another story... For a long time, some FA activists projected on the Besnard group the same fantasies they projected on the Alliance. The Besnard group activists were accused of "investing positions" in the FA. There is something suspicious about an anarchist group that recruits and grows; when it reached a certain size it formed another group.

60 One day, a couple of activists from Longwy contacted us and asked us to come at regular intervals to explain to them what the Alliance was all about (Longwy was a very important ironworks centre). For several months, a comrade and I made the trip in my old Renault 4. We arrived on Saturdays at the end of the morning left the next afternoon. Very quickly the "political" trip turned into a visit to friends in the provinces. One day, the guy said to us: "Listen, we have to tell you that at the same time as we contacted you, we also contacted Lutte ouvrière [*a Trotskyist organisation*] and they came alternately with you. Well, we made our choice, it's you that we choose." I then asked: "Why us?" He replied very seriously: "The LO guys are no fun and they can't hold a pint." That's how we got an Alliance group in Longwy, because the comrades weren't alone and we then met their group.

I think the Alliance has had a lasting, unspectacular, but profound influence on the libertarian movement. It has provided a generation of activists, and that is never lost. It made it possible to organize for ten years militants who otherwise would have dispersed, and who would undoubtedly have given up for lack of prospects. It helped to keep the torch of revolutionary syndicalism alive at a time of transition⁶¹ when post-war militants were beginning to disappear and there was not yet a new generation. Finally, it introduced new theoretical approaches, broke taboos, broke the diabolical vision that anarchists had of Marxism and showed the need for real coherence in theoretical development. It's not that bad....

Looking back at the collection of *Solidarité ouvrière*, we can see that we have an astonishing militant testimony on the period of constitution of the Union of the Left, which ended with the arrival in power of the Socialist Party.

With the current recomposition of the trade union landscape, I think that the reconstitution of something similar to the Alliance syndicaliste could make it possible to coordinate the SR and AS currents not only in the trade union movement, but also in all the organs of struggle that are created conjuncturally.

Indeed, a number of new data have emerged that radically change the context. It is perhaps significant that the end of the Alliance corresponds roughly to the end of the “Trente Glorieuses” and the appearance of neoliberalism and “globalization”. Perhaps the Alliance's demise is linked to its inability to adapt to this new context. During the period when we were militating there, there was still a massive awareness in the workers

61 The transitional character of this generation of activists can be seen in the nature of the relations we had with the old militants who had supported us. The transmission of revolutionary memory was done by conversations – during meetings, but also in the pubs or restaurants. The elders taught us lots of things which will never appear in any history book, especially as the CGT-SR periodically destroyed its archives for security reasons. It was at Gaston Leval's house that we met Julian Gorkin, old Makhnovists and many others. When Gaston Leval recounted his stormy encounters with Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin, these characters became real, they were no longer historical figures. Alexandra Kollontai told him in 1921 that she was afraid of the party leadership, and that so that she and her comrades in the Workers' Opposition could meet, they pretended to have tea. Trotsky, passing through Paris, feared a bad move by Stalin's henchmen. He asked the CGT-SR to ensure his safety. The comrades refused and vigorously reminded him of Kronstadt. Marcel Body recounted that when the Bolsheviks had held on to power for three months, the party leadership celebrated; Lenin was quoted as saying: “Whatever happens now, we have held on as long as the Paris Commune. Of course, at the time, we didn't think to write all this down and much of what we were told is lost forever

movement of the separation of classes. This was an obvious point that was not questioned.

Today, this class consciousness has been considerably eroded and it is sometimes difficult to make the younger generations aware of it. No one could prevent this phenomenon of crumbling. I remember distributing CGT leaflets during one of the government's many attacks on social security. The attitude of passers-by was significant: many people looked at a leaflet from the CGT with some disgust. However, they were employees who were the first to be affected by these attacks against the Social Security system. The impregnation of neo-liberal ideas among many people is the result of extremely effective employer and government propaganda.

- So the first point I think it is important to stress is that the struggle on the ideological field seems to me today more than necessary.

- The second point is that militants and workers must be prepared for the different techniques of group manipulation so that they are able to counter attempts to take control of their structures by so-called “vanguards”;

- The third point is that the coordination work could no longer be limited to trade union organisations but should extend to all the bodies of the “social movement” that have been set up outside trade unionism and political parties.

- The last point is the need to extend relations at international level, for obvious reasons linked to globalisation, with all organisations close in objectives and practices..

Modernity provides considerable advantages to the movement if it is able to take advantage of it. The gap that once existed between the cultivated strata of the population and the proletarianized masses, at least in industrial countries, has narrowed considerably, removing any justification for the petty-bourgeois intellectuals' claims to set themselves as the self-proclaimed leaders of the workers movement. Trade union activists today, like those of the past, are just as capable of reflection and conceptualization as lawyers, journalists and doctors who were candidates a century ago for the leadership of the labour movement. This observation in itself introduces a requirement: the sociological composition of the revolutionary class has changed. If the weight of the traditional proletariat has not changed in nature – whatever one may say, a strike by garbage collectors, railway workers, factory workers has a greater impact on our daily lives than a strike by hairdressers, bailiffs or antique dealers – it has changed in demographic terms. The problem, raised by Pierre Besnard in 1926, of the integration of non-working class members in the strict sense of the term; the employee, civil servant, foreman, technician, teacher, scientist, writer, artist,

who live exclusively on the product of their work therefore remains more relevant than ever.

This again implies the need for a new reflection on the notion of productive work, which can no longer be limited to the criteria developed by socialist thinkers of the last century, and on the function of work in today's society.

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