

## INTRODUCTION

It is characteristic of modern trade-union movements—those which emerged from the twin crucibles of the Great Depression and the immediate post-World War II periods—that they face in two directions. Unions exist to defend the material interests of all or part of the wage-labor force in their societies. But however differently unions have defined these tasks in different places, rarely, in the modern period, have they been content with self-definitions which restricted their activities to the market place alone. The advanced capitalism of “post-war settlements”—a term which refers to the socioeconomic equilibria struck in the immediate post-1945 period—has not allowed this. Complex networks of representative democracy, highly developed patterns of coordination between major social actors (producer groups in particular), plus state interventions in the accumulation process itself have made strictly market-centered trade unionism little more than a myth from the golden past. Everywhere unions have explicit programs for shaping and changing national economic and social processes which dictate the mobilization of political resources for implementation. Everywhere unions are involved in attempting to influence the electoral behavior of their rank and file. Everywhere unions define the aggregation and specification of their memberships’ political interests as part of their tasks. In short, union involvement in politics, over and above union activities in the labor market, is a universal fact of social life.

There are very great variations between different union movements in the ways in which they do participate in their national political processes, however. Some unions, primarily but not exclusively the “business unionism” of North American, attempt to intervene politically as pressure groups and voting blocs without open affiliation with a political party. Most other unions focus much of their political attention through affiliation with political parties. If direct union-party affiliation is very common, however, the nature of such affiliation also varies greatly. Two general types of affiliation predominate. First, there is the social democratic type,

roughly associated with union movements and political parties which grew to maturity in the years of the Socialist Second International. Party-unions of a social democratic kind share one general characteristic—both the union and the party maintain primary autonomy in deciding their own strategies in their respective spheres. Thus unions, for their own reasons, decide on their labor market and political strategies, while the party decides on politics. In the case of social democratic union-party complexes, then, relationships of mutual influence between union and party are relationships of rough equality. Exchanges between them go in both directions so that generalizations about whether party or union will be determinant in any given situation are hazardous.

The second type of affiliation is that which developed in the Third International/Communist tradition. In the Third International/Communist model of union-party relationships the weight of the political party in determining trade union strategy and goals has tended to be vastly greater than in the social democratic type. The historical reasons for this are obvious. One of the major failures which Lenin and the other founders of the Communist International in the 1920s attributed to earlier socialist movements was the growing domination of the concerns of “reformist” trade unions—ever more bound up in complex networks of collaboration with capitalists and the capitalist state—over revolutionary political parties. Lenin’s discussion of working-class “spontaneity” and trade unionism in *What is to be Done?* is eloquent and uncompromising on this point. Left to their own resorts, unions would become a vehicle for bourgeois ideology among the working class. What was needed was the intervention of “professional revolutionaries” in the unfolding of labor-market and other union struggles to bring revolutionary class consciousness to the workers “from without.” When Communists approached the task of organization building in the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution, they therefore chose what they believed to be a corrective course to protect the revolutionary integrity of their movement by rather dramatically increasing the strategic subordination of affiliated union movements to Communist Parties.<sup>1</sup>

The work which follows is a case study of union-party relationships of this Third International/Communist type. It examines the modern ties between the French *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) and the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF). The PCF has not always dominated the CGT. In fact, predominant Communist power within the Confederation dates only from the immediate post-World War II years. Since then, however, the facts of PCF power over the CGT have been clear and consis-

1. Lenin’s articles and speeches on unionism, including relevant passages from *What is to be Done?*, discussion of unions in the Soviet Union and the Third International, have been collected in *Lenin on Trade Unions* (1970). See also Bernard Badie, *Stratégie de la grève* (1976) for a discussion of France and Leninist views on unions.

tent. Despite the fact that there has been a studied attempt to maintain an equitable division of posts between Communists and non-Communists on the CGT *Bureau Confédéral*, the Confederation's highest executive body, the two post-1947 leaders of the CGT, Benoît Frachon and Georges Séguy, were both members of the PCF *Bureau Politique* (BP). And more often than not they have had *Bureau Confédéral* colleagues who were either BP members or members of the PCF Central Committee. In addition, for the most part the non-Communists on the *Bureau Confédéral* have shared a clear "class point of view" with their Communist colleagues, having been coopted to the *Bureau Confédéral* primarily because of this. The next highest regular deliberative levels of the CGT—the *Commission Exécutive* (CE), composed of members elected by the CGT Congress, and the *Comité Confédéral National* (CCN), composed of the Secretaries-General of the CGT's constituent organizations (industrial federations and geographical unions)—have consistently been overwhelmingly Communist in membership. At present, for example, the CE elected at the Fortieth Congress in 1978 is 80 percent Communist, and the percentage of Communists on the CCN is even higher. The triannual Congress, which is the legal repository of long-term strategic decision-making for the CGT, has been attended, over the years, by delegates from constituent unions, the vast majority of whom have been members of the PCF. The Secretaries-General of the CGT's industrial federations have been almost universally Communist, with a liberal sprinkling among them of members of the party Central Committee and even, on occasion, members of the *Bureau Politique*. The major CGT publication, *La Vie Ouvrière*, was run in 1981 by a member of the CGT *Bureau Confédéral*, Henri Krasucki, who was also a member of the PCF *Bureau Politique*. Thus the fact that only a minority of CGT members at large (20–30 percent, depending upon the period) are PCF members ought not to be misleading. The CGT organization is run by Communists, who virtually monopolize its critical middle levels. And Communists, whether officials or simple *militants*, are the life blood and vitality of the Confederation. It is the statutory duty of ordinary Communists to belong to and be active within trade unions—the CGT when possible—at their place of work, which means that a substantial part of the PCF's membership is involved in the CGT. At the very least, little can happen within the CGT of which Communists do not approve. And, as our examination of the CGT's modern history will demonstrate, the shaping hand of Communists in CGT behavior is much greater than mere approval.

The CGT's own denial of any connection with political parties—let alone the PCF—is in large part ritual, then, as the CGT's behavior amply indicates. Such ritual is, of course, connected with a long tradition in France. The 1906 *Charte d'Amiens*, one of the CGT's founding documents, declared that while the CGT should be class oriented and revolutionary, it should also be non-partisan. Like all rituals, however, the CGT's claim of

non-partisanship is not a complete mystification. To note that Communists predominate in the CGT organization and in its decision-making does not necessarily imply that the CGT will follow PCF lines, whatever they might be. In fact, the Communists in the modern CGT present themselves publicly as trade unionists, claiming that their party affiliation is a separate and unrelated matter. While generally this is a somewhat jesuitical argument, it does contain a modicum of serious content. The CGT is a labor "mass organization" whose success at maintaining itself and deepening its influence depends on its ability to defend the material interests of its members and sympathizers. Since the Confederation must attempt to reach as broad a working-class audience as possible, if only to protect its preeminent but not inevitable place as part of the broader pluralistic French labor movement, it must, Communist control or not, avoid overly partisan positions in order to speak to its target constituency.

The problematic which forms the core of this project is given by these two apparently contradictory claims on the CGT. The modern CGT is dominated by the PCF, and one can reasonably assume both that this domination is not gratuitous and that its purpose is ultimately partisan. On the other hand the CGT, to survive and thrive, must be a labor mass organization able to transcend partisan issues. PCF members have been in a position to determine the orientations of the modern CGT. Yet because the CGT can only be useful politically if it is simultaneously successful as a mass organization in mobilizing workers far beyond the perimeters of political fidelity to the PCF, the PCF cannot simply use the CGT as a direct action arm for PCF politics. The PCF needs and cherishes the CGT as its *central* instrument for cultivating and mobilizing working-class support for its goals. Yet the instrument can perform these tasks *only* if it behaves in a very different way from the party itself. With this in mind it becomes immediately clear that the PCF, as a political party, is likely to have one strategy, while the CGT is likely to have a different one, appropriate to its status as a mass organization. The strategic subordination of union to party, which we have posited as the distinguishing characteristic of Third International/Communist unionism, is likely to be achieved by arrangements of strategic *complementarity*, rather than strategic uniformity. The union will elaborate its own strategy in ways which will ultimately contribute to the advancement of the party's strategy. Our task, then, is to document for the modern period the ways in which the CGT has resolved the contradictory claims on its action, party affiliation and mass-organizational appeal, in terms which make its positions ultimately complementary to those of the PCF's. To do so we will have to examine CGT strategy, party strategy, and the exact nature of their ultimately complementary relationships.

Studying CGT-PCF relationships, as they have evolved in the post-World War II period, has another dimension to it, over and above the ob-

viously relevant task of analyzing a particular manifestation of the more general pattern of trade-union-political rapport in modern capitalism. Western European Communism has been widely studied of late, primarily because of the interesting and difficult-to-understand processes of Eurocommunization which the Italian, Spanish and French parties have been undergoing.<sup>2</sup> Alas, widely studied does not mean well studied! Much of the modern work on Western European Communism suffers from narrowness of conception.<sup>3</sup> Inquiry has been directed, almost exclusively, towards the areas of general strategy and foreign policy. Students of strategy have tried to discern what European Communists want to do, what kinds of policies they desire to promote, how they foresee attaining their new goals. More globally, the questions asked are "Are they really democratic?"—with "democratic" often meaning "safe"—or, from a very different political vantage point, "Are they now social democratic?" The foreign-policy specialists want to assess the likely impact of new Communist behavior on existing patterns of international relations. Here the questions are "Have they really changed?" and "Is the new European Communism good or bad for the United States (or NATO, the EEC, or the Russians)?"

Focus on strategy and international politics is not necessarily wrong. The problem is, rather, that looking only at strategy and foreign policy makes full understanding of Western European Communism difficult. Communist parties, even modern parties touched by Eurocommunism, are not parties like the others. In fact, Communist *parties*, strictly speaking, are only a part—albeit the central part—of complex sociopolitical *formations*. In all major Western European cases, for example, the party itself is the strategic head and nervous system of a whole corpus of organizations, all designed, in different ways, to prompt large numbers of people to share points of view and take actions which will advance general Communist goals. And in each of these cases Communist influence over organized labor is the keystone of Communist efforts to mobilize mass support. Thus we are not only studying the important problem of trade-union-political relationships in a particular type of situation, we are also attempting to

2. Probably the best sources to get to the heart of Eurocommunization are those of the parties themselves. In English, see the interview with Giorgio Napolitano, in E. Hobsbawm, *The Italian Road to Socialism* (1977) and Santiago Carrillo, *Eurocommunism and the State* (1977). On the French party see Jean Kanapa, "Les caractéristiques de l'eurocommunisme," in *Recherches Internationales* (March-April 1976) and Georges Marchais' report to the important PCF Twenty-second Congress, in *Cahiers du Communisme* (February 1976), reprinted in PCF, *Le socialisme pour la France* (1976). See also, on a more theoretical plane, the PCF's *Traité d'économie politique (le capitalisme monopoliste d'état)*. For a brief approach to the PCF's flirtation with Eurocommunism, see George Ross, "The End of the Bolshevik Dream," in Carl Boggs and David Plotke, ed., *The Politics of Eurocommunism* (1980).

3. Perhaps the best collection of serious work on the PCF and PCI which attempts to transcend the strategic and foreign policy biases is D. L. M. Blackmer and S. Tarrow, eds., *Communism in Italy and France* (1975).

begin redressing the balance in the study of Western European Communism by treating the Communist phenomenon in its full scope.

To this point we have only opened our discussion, of course. Simply detailing the facts of PCF power in the CGT tells us little except that Communists are powerful in the CGT. More generally, asserting that the CGT-PCF relations are exemplary of the union-party relations created in the Third International/Communist tradition tells us little about these relations. Simple examination of what the PCF itself is doing will therefore tell us little, a priori, about what the CGT is doing at the same time. Thus far we only know that these relations and the use of PCF power in the CGT will be primarily concerned with resolving a contradiction between partisan goals and mass appeal. The PCF needs its connections with the CGT to generate working-class political support, to socialize workers politically to hold visions of the world congruent with the party's goals. On the other hand, the CGT has to be effective in the labor market and not allow overt politics to diminish its capacities to make a mass trade-union appeal to French workers. Attempting to resolve this contradiction at different points in the development of French post-war capitalism is likely to have created different forms of the union-party relationship, even within the general limit of PCF control over the CGT.

The form of union-party relationship decided upon by the CGT and PCF at any given time is almost certain to fall somewhere between two obvious limits. Extreme politicization of union activity in support of party political goals, other things being equal, is likely to cripple the union's ability to make a credible mass appeal to workers, many of whom will disagree with the politics in question, feel that politicization should not be part of the union's activities, or be apolitical altogether. At the other extreme, a strictly labor-market-centered unionism which avoids politics will not shape working-class political options and attitudes in the ways desired by the PCF and therefore will waste using the political opportunity which PCF influence over the CGT presents. Between these two extremes, however, there exist a number of possible formulations of union-party relationships. "Transmission beltism," in which the party conceives of the union as a quasi-direct conduit for mobilizing workers around party political goals, is one classic formulation from Third International/Communist union traditions. It is characteristic of the transmission-belt form to find the party using its influence over the union to translate day-to-day political purposes into union activity. The primary frame of union reference in transmission-belt periods becomes, therefore, the rhythms of political life, which are imposed by the party on the union. What is important about this is the subordination to politics of the rhythms of the labor market, which have their own autonomy and which are the primary frame of reference for most ordinary unions. Transmission-belt-union politics may be moderate or radical, cautious or reckless. What matters is less the content of the politics

directly imposed upon union life by the party, than the fact of this imposition.

Another basic form of union-party ties is what we will call "relative autonomy." Here the party recognizes that the dynamics of the labor market ought to be the primary focus of labor mass-organizational activity. Strategic subordination of the union to broader Communist goals persists in the relative autonomy model, but it is formulated in a very different way. The developing shape of events in the labor market allows any union, of whatever political leanings, a broad range of choice between strategic and tactical options, any one of which may be plausibly congruent with the task of defending the interests of the rank and file. The relative autonomy form recognizes this. What characterizes the behavior of a relatively autonomous Communist-influenced union is that, after consideration of all of the possible union options given in a specific labor-market situation, it will choose that option which is most likely to further Communist political goals.

Both the transmission-belt and the relative-autonomy forms of union-party ties involve union subordination to party strategy, the first directly and the second indirectly. One could also envisage a third type of tie, therefore, perhaps labelled "union autonomy." In this form the party might decide that the best use of its influence over the union would be to set up two different strategic poles of activity, one in the party, the other in the union, without the latter being subordinate to the former. This form of union-party tie would depart from classical Leninist views on the use of mass organizations by positing strategic decentralization. The union would pursue change-oriented goals of its own, set by itself. The party would do likewise. The task of promoting party-union complementarity would then become one of coordination between equals moving on separate fronts towards a common goal rather than subordination of union to party strategy. While such strategic polycentrism is not habitual in Third International/Communist union-party relationships, it is at least theoretically conceivable.

It would be unduly abstract to discuss possible types of union-party relationships without raising the issue of the actual *strategic context* of such relationships. The CGT and PCF did not develop different divisions of labor between them simply for reasons of principle. They did so in order to facilitate the achievement of specific goals in French society. Our focus will be not only on what kind of union-party relationships came to exist, their mechanisms and their shape, but, more importantly, on what these relationships were *for*. How the party explains the world theoretically, what alliances it may be pursuing, what kinds of mass mobilization it desires, what policies it advocates for the present and future, how the party hopes to model working-class understanding of the socioeconomic environment—all of these will change with changes in party perspectives and in the

context which the party faces. To the degree to which such concerns become those of the union, the content and goals of union behavior will be affected. The union itself must specify its own strategy, which will be separate in important ways from that of the party, and this will change in time as well.

This study, therefore, examines historically the evolution of PCF-CGT relationships in the modern period, focusing both on the general forms of these relationships and on the specific strategic and tactical content with which party and union filled in these forms. Part One traces party-union relations in the Stalin-Thorez era, beginning with the consolidation of PCF influence over the CGT, through the transmission-belt use of this influence following World War II, to the beginnings of a shift towards relative autonomy in the mid-1950s. Part Two discusses the development of CGT-PCF ties in the Fifth Republic to May-June 1968, roughly the definitional years of CGT relative autonomy. Part Three examines the contradictory development of CGT relative autonomy in the historical context of PCF Eurocommunization in the period from the late 1960s through the disastrous electoral failure of March 1978. The conclusion is a more general consideration of the profound crisis for the CGT and the PCF which was opened by the 1978 electoral catastrophe.