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Reform and Revolution

Moderates and Revolutionaries in the French CGT

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world) did change - in the direction of state capitalism and bureaucracy. To put the "reformists" plans in perspective, consider how different society would be if the 40-50% of the economy presently controlled by the state was in the hands of worker and consumer-run co-operatives and mutual aid societies.

Today, we are far enough removed in time from the schism within French syndicalism to examine the dispute objectively. In large measure the "moderates" remained faithful to libertarian syndicalism. This syndicalism was not grounded in Bakunin, Blanqui or Marx as were the more revolutionary varieties, but was based upon the concepts of the "father of anarchism", Pierre Joseph Proudhon.

The last word should go to the chief spokesman for Proudhonist syndicalism, Leon Jouhaux,⁷⁵ who, while interned by the Nazis, wrote:

It is in old Proudhon that I have found the best of comforts. I've drawn from his clear and simple style thoughts that correspond to my own... How many of his thoughts grasp reality. For example, "No one dares to deny that the revolution has for its object the emancipation of the masses and the preponderance of labour over property."⁷⁶

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⁷⁵ "Jouhaux stayed faithful, as in 1909 he is the spokesman of libertarian syndicalism and the heritage of Proudhon." Georges, Tintant, op cit, p.443 "Leon Jouhaux was always recognized as faithful to the old Proudhonist ideas." Jean Bancal, op cit. p.37

⁷⁶ Georges, Tintant, op cit, p.4

ANARCHISM AND SYNDICALISM

Until the outbreak of the First World War the Confederation General du Travail (CGT) was a revolutionary anarcho-syndicalist union federation. Thereafter, the CGT was taken over by reformists and became an ordinary conservative trade union. So goes the accepted viewpoint. Murray Bookchin makes a statement which is a classic in this regard. "Under Leon Jouhaux, the syndicalist CGT became bureaucratized, and, apart from the revolutionary rhetoric, a fairly conventional trade union."¹

For Daniel Guerin, the anarchist aspect of the CGT ended in 1914.² Sima Lieberman states that "The minimum program it published in December 1918 was reformist in nature".³ For Nicholas Papayanis, the CGT "had become democratic and integrated into the capitalist state" and that only "Russian Bolshevism challenged French syndicalism to become authentically revolutionary."⁴ Val Lorwin felt the demise of revolutionary syndicalism began even earlier, for "the revolutionary current was receding by 1910."⁵

Almost seventy five years have passed since the supposed "right-turn" of the CGT and therefore we are far enough removed in time to examine this claim in a more objective light. A first step in this examination requires a brief review of the history of anarcho-syndicalism before the break between "revolutionaries" and "moderates".

Anarchism had reached an impasse by the 1890's. The "Propaganda of the Deed" era had proven a disaster, for the attentats had only created intense state oppression and the undying myth

¹ Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists*, Harper Colophon, N.Y., 1977, p.137

² Daniel Guerin, *Anarchism*, Monthly Review, N.Y., 1970, p.91

³ Sima Lieberman, *Labor Movements and Labor Thought*, Praeger, N.Y., 1986, p.208

⁴ Nicholas Papayanis, *Alphonse Merrheim: The Emergence of Reformism in Revolutionary Syndicalism*, Martinus Nijhoff, Dordrecht, 1985, p.141

⁵ Val Lorwin, *The French Labor Movement*, Harvard, Cambridge, 1979, p.45

of the anarchist as bomb throwing terrorist. Some militants suggested that libertarians should amalgamate with the labor movement. Little was new in this approach, which was more of a return to anarchism's Proudhonist roots, but the idea helped give birth to the CGT in 1895.⁶

Anarcho-syndicalism's chief theoretician was a young journalist, Fernand Pelloutier, who developed the basic ideology of the movement. Pelloutier made a clear break with the glorification of violence infecting anarchism and objected to barricades style revolution in the belief that military technology had made it obsolete.⁷ The general strike was the modern way to make a revolution, a method both peaceful and legal. Legal in a sense that a workers' ability to labour is his property and he has the right to dispose of it as he sees fit - including withdrawing it.⁸ Pelloutier broke with naive anarchism that sees all states as exactly the same, and while stating that "no essential difference" existed among states, believed a republic provided greater opportunities for workers than other types of regimes.⁹ He also inspired the development of the Bourse de Travail, a kind of workers central which encouraged self-education and mutualism. Self-management of the work-place was the desired goal. All of these were typically Proudhonist sentiments. But the "Father of Anarchism" wasn't the only influence. In

⁶ "...when trade unions were at last fully legalized in 1884 it was by Proudhonist workers that the new, large, peaceable industrial syndicates as well as the small revolutionary craft unions were built up...The victory of the Proudhonist tradition came at the Congress of Amiens of 1906, when a charter was adopted separating the trade unions from the political movement...Before the Second World War, French trade unionism had turned to politics and was becoming the prey of parties and sects, but if one asks oneself in what respect trade unionism in France differs from trade unionism in other West European countries, the answer must be in the influence of Proudhon's ideas." J. Hamden Jackson, Marx, Proudhon and European Socialism, English Universities Press, London, 1957

⁷ Jeremy Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, St Martins, N.Y., 1990., p.15

⁸ *ibid*, p.16

⁹ *ibid*, p.14

Using well organized and disciplined cadre from the party, they were able to impose themselves into leadership positions in the new unions created by the sit-down strikers. By 1938 the libertarians, both "moderates" and "revolutionaries", were outnumbered by the Communists. Communist strength was soon to make itself felt as syndicalists were pushed out of office and the unions taken over by loyal Moscow-men.

The syndicalists fought back. The assistant director of the CGT, Rene Belin, organized a group around the review *Syndicats*, "to defend a pure syndicalist conception of the CGT's role".⁷³ They were pacifist and strongly anti-communist, and received slightly less than half the votes in the CGT congress of 1938, as the "Independence of Syndicalism" tendency.⁷⁴ Syndicalism was still strong within the CGT, but not strong enough to resist the Communist take-over. By the end of WWII Communist domination of the union was complete and the CGT became the most important cog in the French Stalinist machine.

The history of the CGT up to the time of its seizure by the Communists represents an evolutionary process within anarchism and syndicalism. We have seen how syndicalism was itself a response to the crisis of anarchism in the 1890's. We have also seen how a naive and idealistic anarcho-syndicalism came into conflict with harsh reality. The CGT's "reformism" represents an attempt to come to terms with the Twentieth Century economy, to develop an anarcho-syndicalism for the 1920's and 30's rather than remain eternally in the 1890's or jump on the Bolshevik bandwagon. They did not succeed in their endeavor, and from a strictly anarchist perspective there were flaws, but the CGT majority did try to develop a transitional program, which if enacted, would have completely changed the nature of French society. France (and the rest of the

⁷³ Robert Paxton, *Vichy France*, Barrie and Jenkins, London, 1970, p.275

⁷⁴ *ibid*, p.277. The Stalinist takeover also had the unfortunate effect of propelling Belin and some other syndicalists into the ranks of Vichy.

programs nationalisation did not mean statism, for the proposed managerial system "conform[ed] to the CET of 1919".⁷⁰

Writing in 1937, the CGT analysed the recent development of capitalism and came to conclusions similar to those of the past; "The decadence of capitalism is complex and does not fully and completely verify the doctrines of not so long ago which believed that the concentration of industry and banking etc., would engender a situation making possible and necessary a new society... Certainly capitalist concentration has reached gigantic proportions, but beside these colossi, subsist smaller industries, far from disappearing, the middle classes are strong and politically active, and the working class does not yet constitute the majority of the nation... Less than claims of immediate and total socialization, nor its realization in one blow, it is more necessary to conquer places of resistance... to organize the penetration of a decadent economy by basic elements of a new economy".⁷¹

THE STALINISTS TAKE OVER

The major event of the mid-1930's CGT was the unification with the Communist CGTU in 1936. At the unification congress the Stalinists tried to impose centralism upon the union as a means to impose their will upon it. But the majority of delegates voted in favor of the traditional federalism. In spite of the Communists, the new CGT remained opposed to the closed shop and compulsory dues check-off as "contrary to [syndicalist] traditions" and the delegates supported workers' control of industry.⁷²

A syndicalist unified CGT was not to last. The sit-down strikes of 1936-7 provided an opportunity for the Stalinists to take over.

⁷⁰ *ibid*, p.310-312

⁷¹ CGT, *op cit*, p.176

⁷² H.W. Ehrmann, *French Labor From Popular Front to Liberation*, Oxford, N.Y., 1947, p.55

keeping with Blanquist and Bakuninist conceptions, which were also part of the workers' movement, the syndicalist revolution was to be an act of will by the proletariat. No attempt was made to theoretically understand the economy and apply this knowledge to the union movement.¹⁰ This lack of theory caused problems and gave rise to demands for change.

SYNDICALISM IN CRISIS

The CGT had an inspiring first decade as the movement spread through France. Its ideas and tactics became influential throughout the industrializing world giving us "sabotage" and the word "syndicalism" as a synonym for revolutionary or anarchist trade unionism. The IWW, the Spanish, Argentine and Italian syndicalist movements all owe something to the CGT. But after this enthusiastic start, the federation began to go into deep crisis.

One major problem was workers did not flock to the union. In 1909 there were 8 million workers in France of whom only 300,000 were in the CGT. Only eleven percent were unionized and not even half of those were in anarcho-syndicalist unions.¹¹ Rather than improving, this situation became worse, for in 1914 the CGT may have had as few as 6000 members.¹² CGT members were not particularly militant - the most violent strikes of the era occurred in social democratic unions.¹³ The union's weakness can in part be attributed to the fact that France did not have a large industrial proletariat - 72% of French workers were employed in shops of less than 20 people in 1906 and 20% of the population still labored at home.¹⁴

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.30

¹¹ Bernard Georges, Denise Tintant, Leon Jouhaux, Vol 1, *Presse Universitaires de France*, Paris, 1962, p.11

¹² Lieberman, *op cit*, p.206

¹³ Peter Stearns, *Workers and Protest*, Peacock, Itasca N.Y., p.132

¹⁴ Lieberman, *op cit*, p.204

Other factors dampened revolutionary ardour. Conflict existed between foreign and native French workers who were far from having the internationalist sentiments of their leaders. These prejudices and disputes were a limiting factor on the development of revolutionary attitudes.¹⁵ Syndicalists also deceived themselves as to the weakness of capital, the state and feelings of nationalism.¹⁵ "The workers desires were moderate and few members of syndicalist organizations wanted what their leaders wanted and revolutionary syndicalist organizations did not touch the majority of organized French workers in any significant way."¹⁶

The weakness of the CGT was exposed by the failure of its actions. The federation struck on 1 May 1906 for the eight hour day. The strike failed and of the 202,000 strikers only 10,000 achieved any reduction in hours.¹⁷ After the breaking of the Draveil building workers strike in 1908, "the CGT was in disarray."¹⁸ "The notion and immanence of general strike couldn't be forever maintained..."¹⁹ This feebleness was further exposed when military service was extended from two to three years. Due to the lack of support the union was unable to launch a general strike.²⁰ Pierre Monatte, later to lead the revolutionary opposition to the "reformist" CGT, wrote in 1913 that the "...accept that the revolution involved more than the taking of the unions must Champs Elysees by storm and therefore needed a serious effort at recruitment and organization...the syndicats were tired and weak..."²¹

The revolutionary syndicalist, Hubert Lagardelle in 1912 declared that the state and employers had proven much stronger

¹⁵ Lorwin, op cit, p.48

¹⁶ Stearns, op cit, pps. 126, 197

¹⁷ Papayanis, op cit, p.20

¹⁸ *ibid*, p.37

¹⁹ Lorwin, op cit, p.45

²⁰ Jennings, op cit, p.156

²¹ *ibid*, p.157

That same year, the CGT wrote a new Minimum Program which included the socialization of all monopolies, the introduction of workers' control, the institution of the CET and the internationalisation of the economy. The Radical Socialist government created a National Economic Council and invited the syndicalists to join. They did, but criticized the Council saying that it "needed to be decentralized, and to have an internationalist viewpoint." There was also a demand that the scientific organization of work (Taylorism) which the Council favored, be controlled by worker delegates and "the scientific organization of work should be followed by workers' control".⁶⁹

The same year the CGT began a social insurance plan. "A major campaign launched across the country" saw the creation of a Caisse de Travail functioning in conjunction with the unions and the Co-op Federation. This body was a mutual aid society managed by union members. However, most workers did not join the Caisse, and the CGT formed a new and highly successful organization called the National Workers Mutual Federation which still exists today. Going back to Pelloutier's Bourse de Travail, the CGT also created libraries, workers' archives and adult education courses. Eventually about 100 Worker Colleges were in operation, administered by a commission composed of union delegates, teacher and student representatives.

In 1934 they again revised the Minimum Program and proposals were made clearly distinguishing between reforms which ameliorated conditions and those of a structural nature aimed at a general transformation of society. The plan of 1934 also sought to raise the buying power of workers to overcome the Depression. They suggested fighting unemployment through a reduction of the work week. There were also demands for nationalisation of banking, primary materials (like mining) energy and transport. As with earlier

⁶⁹ Lafranc, op cit, p.286

With one exception, the inclusion of the state as an aspect of the collectivity, the CET's proposals could be seen as faithful to anarchist ideals. It conformed to Proudhon's economic concepts which were never monolithic like other forms of socialism. The "father of anarchism" envisaged a mixed economy involving workers' associations for large scale production and individual or family ownership for small industry.⁶⁶

Regions and municipalities have always played an important role in the anarchist conception of the future society, but the CET proposal allowed the national government a role in the economy, albeit a very minor one. If one wants to charge the CGT with revisionism, here is the place. Their response to such accusations may well have been that two votes out of eighteen wouldn't count for much. These policies were also the result of a compromise among number of different groups.

While trade unions and cooperatives were interested in the CET, employers and government were not. Since the workers' organizations were divided and not strong enough to impose these structural reforms upon society, the Minimum Program remained largely an ideal. But in spite of these weakness, the CGT continued to promote the goals of their program.

The influence of Proudhonian anarchism became more pronounced in the years following the schism. By 1924 the union had developed a veritable "cult of Proudhon."⁶⁷ "The CGT ...embraced Proudhonian thought. It decided to achieve three goals: the immediate improvement of working conditions in France, the education of the working class, and the development of plans...based upon the socialization of economic activity and the administration of such activity by workers".⁶⁸

⁶⁶ P.J. Proudhon, *The General Idea of Revolution in the 19th Century*, Freedom Press, London, 1927.

⁶⁷ Saposs, op cit, p.75

⁶⁸ Lieberman, op cit, p.211

than the syndicats and this weakness provoked disputes within the union.²² At first, these disputes involved the social democrats who wished to turn the federation into a normal bread and butter union. They attempted to take over the CGT in 1909 but the revolutionaries were able to "elect one of their own, Leon Jouhaux", as head of the federation.²³ Jouhaux was soon to have his own ideas, but much of this new thinking was to be grounded in research done by the metal workers leader, Alphonse Merrheim.

Merrheim broke with the philosophical idealism of the CGT and began to analyse the steel industry. Prior to his work, there had been no attempt to study the capitalist economy.²⁴ He realized the future of capitalism lay with large factories and for anarcho-syndicalism this meant industrial unionism. (Most syndicalist unions were craft unions at this time) Merrheim and the other "industrial unionists" were attacked as "centralizers" by some of the hard-line craft union anarchists. No matter what his opponants claimed, he did not abandon anarcho-syndicalism, for when arguing against the social democrats in support of Jouhaux, he stated that workers, "did not want rights built on top of capitalism or the state, rather, they wanted a new right created by the workers own force... for the transformation of society. This was the classic revolutionary syndicalist attitude, which Merrheim, no matter what his practice, never abandoned."²⁵

The new syndicalism evolving at this time took into account the real, not the assumed attitudes of the working class, and while "worker pragmatism was not new, the big change was that the leaders now recognized it clearly".²⁶ Thus, prior to 1914, the CGT was forced to confront hyper-radicalism and develop a syndicalism suited the actual, not the imagined social conditions. These new at-

²² *ibid*, p.144

²³ Papayanis, op cit, p.42

²⁴ Jennings, op cit, p.30

²⁵ Papayanis, op cit, p.45

²⁶ Stearns, op cit, p.133

titudes were to lay the groundwork for the post-war CGT. "Moderation" was therefore not some sudden act of "treachery" but was the result of an evolution within the movement - a logical continuation of the process that caused syndicalism to be born out of the failure of anarchism's Propaganda of the Deed era.

It is also debatable just how revolutionary the CGT was at any time in the union's existence. At least one labor historian is challenging the view that French syndicalist leaders were ever violent impractical revolutionaries. Barbara Mitchell, in *The Practical Revolutionaries* shows how most descriptions of anarcho-syndicalism have been tainted by a hostile marxist bias and that both leaders and membership were generally pragmatic. The "revolution now" types were few in number and dismissed by the vast majority as fanatics, appealing only to isolated intellectuals like Georges Sorel. If this is the case, then more continuity existed between the "radical" pre-war CGT and its "moderate" post-war form than either the conflicting parties or historians have ever suspected.

The development of the "new syndicalism" was stopped dead by the First World War. Merrheim was anti-war, but Jouhaux, like most French labour leaders, was not. He was overwhelmed by the war frenzy which swept the population, "for the almost unanimous decision to support the war effort...resulted in part from the accurate realization that the ordinary worker expected such a policy."²⁷

Jouhaux's radical opponents were to point a finger at him for his uninspiring conduct. At the beginning of the war he had succumbed to chauvinistic rhetoric. But then so had Kropotkin, the fire-brand Emile Pouget and the ultra-revolutionary Gustave Hervé. But the pro-war CGT leaders regretted their collapse in face of war hysteria. They became a force for moderation

²⁷ *ibid*, p.122

National Co-operative Federation, and the public and technical workers unions.⁶³ The goal of the CET was to study the problems of implementing the Minimum Program.⁶⁴ A delegate from the Co-op Federation proposed the following positions which were adopted as policy for the CET:

- The economy as a whole to consist of a mixed economy, not excluding individual initiative, traditional co-operatives, or municipal ownership.
- The national enterprises to be autonomous co-operatives with boards of directors of 18 elected delegates representing:
 - A. The producers - workers, manual, non-manual, technical and managerial, six members.
 - B. The consumers - consumer organizations, the co-operative movement and industrial consumers, six members.
 - C. The collectivity - two representatives of the national government, two regional representatives and two representatives of the commune.
- Unionization of national enterprises to be obligatory and all subject to workers' control.
- The profits to be shared, 1/3 for amortising debt, 1/3 for improving worker living conditions, 1/3 for reserve fund.⁶⁵ The CGT was to draft a number of different economic plans in the forthcoming years, but all were variations of the original developed by the CET.

⁶³ Lafranc, *op cit*, p.229

⁶⁴ CGT, *op cit*, p.105

⁶⁵ Lafranc, *op cit*, p.230

ducers and consumers, replacing the state by the "social workshop" and "the management of people by the administration of things".⁵⁹

A NEO-PROUDHONIST PROGRAM

Adapting Proudhonist anarchism to the modern industrial world, they developed a non-statist form of collective ownership. The Minimum Program demanded "the return to the nation of the national wealth" and stated that the Proudhonist conception of "free competition would be again allowed". Economic activity was to be returned to the producers and consumers⁶⁰ in a mixed economy of socialized companies, traditional co-operatives, private and municipal-owned industries. The socialization of industry was to include only a portion of the economy, essentially those sectors which are at present state owned, such as rail, coal mines and electrical power. All socialized companies were to have been autonomous and controlled by representatives of the workers and consumers.⁶¹

The CGT was adamant that such collectivism had nothing in common with statism. Knowing well the character of power they declared, "we do not dream of adding to the attributes of the state nor turn to a system which submits essential industries to functionaries with all the irresponsibility and defective institutionalism. As a consequence the CGT was given the mandate to set up with the organizations of technicians, syndicates and the co-operative movement, an Economic Council of Labour".⁶²

In order to implement the ideas of the Minimum Program a Conseil Economique du Travail (CET) was organized by the CGT at the Lyon Congress of 1919. This united the CGT, the

⁵⁹ Georges, Tintant, op cit, p.330

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p.102

⁶¹ *ibid*, p.105

⁶² *ibid*, p.104

in the post-war era by combatting the vengeful demands of Clemenceau.²⁸

SCHISM IN THE CGT

With the Armistice came new challenges which ultimately caused the split within the CGT. The first of these was the impact of the Russian revolution. Many of the anti-war minority, with the notable exception of Alphonse Merrheim, lauded the Bolsheviks. For a great number of militants an idealized Bolshevism replaced revolutionary anarcho-syndicalist ideology. A fierce debate ensued between pro and anti-Bolshevik factions. The horrors of the Russian Revolution, the intolerance toward other workers' organizations, the violent and bloody civil war, and the preponderance of intellectuals in the leadership of the Communist Party proved to the anti-Bolsheviks that such a revolution was not for France, or as Jouhaux succinctly commented, "Another country, other methods".²⁹ Merrheim was also suspicious and warned that the economy should be run by the workers and not a minority.³⁰ For Pierre Monatte, leader of the pro-Bolshevik "revolutionary" faction, "...one sole question dominates the others - the Russian Revolution!"³¹ Merrheim retorted, "Don't compare our country with Russia... look at our situation as it is".³²

Jouhaux rejected the Leninist concept of revolution and declared, "...you are chasing after a political revolution. What's important for the working class is the economic revolution... Revolution is not a catastrophic act, it is also a long preparation, the

²⁸ D.J. Sapos, *The Labor Movement in Post-War France*, Columbia University Press, N.Y., 1931, p.25

²⁹ Georges, Tintant, op cit, p.313

³⁰ Papayanis, op cit, p.118

³¹ Georges, Tintant, op cit, p.313

³² *ibid*, p.314

long undermining of bourgeois society".³³ Merrheim concurred - "a real revolution is not a political revolution... an authentic revolution is an economic revolution".³⁴ He would later add that a real revolution was "...impossible by violence alone because it is the social milieu that must be transformed, the economic life that must be insured. It is in a word, to put the hand on the instrument of production."³⁵

The revolutionaries insisted the CGT join the Third International. Alfred Rosmer, Pierre Monatte and Raymond Pericat were members of the Comité pour l'adhésion à la 3rd Internationale. Merrheim opposed this move, since the Bolshevik conditions for adhesion, "the 21 conditions violated the fundamental spirit of revolutionary syndicalism", and he reaffirmed adhering to the Charter of Amiens and its anti-political stance.³⁶

The revolutionaries accused the "moderates" of revisionism. But how "orthodox" were these super-radicals? After falling in love with Bolshevism, Rosmer and Monatte agreed in the necessity of a vanguard party.³⁷ The Russian example also showed them that the state could not be abolished and the workers needed a "provisional dictatorship of the proletariat and the institution of our own red army".³⁸ If these positions are not a complete revision of anarchism, what are?

The split within the union saw the majority expelling the revolutionary minority. The dissidents formed a new union with the somewhat ironic name CGT (Unified). At first, the CGTU had

³³ *ibid*, p.314

³⁴ Papayanis, *op cit*, p.117

³⁵ Alphonse Merrheim, *La Revolution Economique*, Paris, 1919, p.18

³⁶ *ibid*, p.139

³⁷ Jennings, *op cit*, p.175

³⁸ *ibid*, p.176. To do justice to Monatte, his flirtation with Leninism was brief. He was expelled from the Communist Party in 1924 as an unreconstructed syndicalist. He then rejoined the syndicalist movement where he remained until his death. Others of the revolutionary faction weren't so principled. Raymond Pericat remained in the CP. George Yvtot ended up a Vichyite.

This creates confusion, since most people equate nationalisation with state ownership. Thus, it would seem the CGT "moderates" totally rejected anarcho-syndicalism in exchange for social democracy. But this was not really the case. Before 1914 Jouhaux thought nationalisation synonymous with statism.⁵⁷ However, as he came to the realization that the modern economy was one of vast enterprises, he began to question the old Proudhonist concept of "the mine to the miners". Some aspects of the economy had to be owned and controlled collectively, to have, for example, the electrical workers owning the power company would put them in a powerful monopoly situation similar to a capitalist corporation. The CGT was to write of these matters in 1937, "The idea of social transformation is inseparable from syndicalism... But it is necessary to admit that the formulas "self-emancipation of the proletariat", "disappearance of capitalist and worker", and those positions of the Charter of Amiens were not accompanied by any real program to reorganize society. One can find rudiments in the conception of the role of the Bourse de Travail, as understood by Pelloutier. One can also note the "workerist" conception, a renewing of Proudhon's "the mine to the miners" One discerns even the related thought of a society constituted by autonomous groupings, some professional, some local, which one knows was opposed to conceptions of socialism called authoritarian or scientific, but there was no program or plan."⁵⁸

The CGT also wanted to avoid a narrow corporatism or a guild-like attitude, or as Jouhaux asked the assembled delegates at the Congress of Lyon, "Do you believe we can transform society with corporate attitudes? Or rather that we should have a conception of the general interest rooted in an associated management by the pro-

⁵⁷ Lafranc, *op cit*, p.217

⁵⁸ CGT, *op cit*, p98-99

had not been taken as a solution. Suppose we are victorious in our general strike... And then what?...With what will we replace the institutions we have destroyed? Such as strike imposes by necessity a constructive politics, which cannot be improvised, much less count on miracles of spontaneous generation. This constructive politics is the basis of the Plan".⁵²

STRUCTURAL REFORMS VS. PALLIATIVES

The CGT proposed structural or revolutionary reforms which had nothing in common with the minimum programs of the socialist parties which were ameliorative and meant to occur within capitalism.⁵³ These structural reforms were to create "the objective conditions for the creation of a new society...[and] are only effective in the measure that they will overcome the management of decadent capitalism".⁵⁴

Jouhaux reinforced this conception of revolutionary reforms stating that, "The new techniques of syndicalism are aimed to develop ...an organization within capitalism which will prepare the organization and structures for when the economic power passes to the proletariat. Hence it is necessary to organize to better destroy".⁵⁵

Another view of the Minimum Program ties in with the charges of reformism. This conception sees the CGT adopting a program of nationalisation of industry. "After the end of WWI another and more realistic vision of the future made its appearance in CGT ranks. Its principle component was nationalisation, favored until then only by socialists and certain radicals".⁵⁶

⁵² CGT, *La CGT ce qu'elle est ce qu'elle veut*, Gallimard, Paris, 1937, p.109

⁵³ *ibid*, p.182

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p.183

⁵⁵ Georges, Tintant, *op cit*, p.332

⁵⁶ Lowell Noonan, *France: The Politics of Continuity and Change*, Holt Reinhart, N.Y., 1970 p.306

more anarchist members than Leninists, but the latter co-opted many erstwhile libertarians. Acting as a disciplined body, they were able to out-manouver the revolutionary anarchists and captured the CGTU for Moscow. This takeover became "the guinea pig of Leninist-Stalinist tactics of trade union conquest by the party".³⁹

THE NEW "MODERATE" CGT

In rejecting Bolshevism, Merrheim and Jouhaux rejected all other forms of catastrophism. They realized capitalism was not about to collapse, and the future of the capitalist economy was found in the United States with its mass production and nascent consumerism. The economic and social developments in the United States, "exercised a profound influence on them"⁴⁰ and "Jouhaux in 1919 discovered the complexity of the modern economy."⁴¹

How prescient the "moderates" seem. Compare their views with the revolutionary minority who believed that no alternative existed but "submitting to the oppression of the bourgeoisie, no longer the possibility of liberalism...no other alternative than to...make the revolution...The hour of revolution has come".⁴²

Attitudes changed within the GGT majority. Old time French syndicalism was workerist in the worst fashion - only the "horny-handed sons of toil" need apply. The new CGT welcomed the white collar government and service workers, who, even in 1918, were beginning to become numerous. "Worker" in in the pre-war move-

³⁹ *ibid*, p.57

⁴⁰ Georges Lafranc, *Le Mouvement Syndical sous la Trosème Republique*, Payot, Paris, 1976, p.305

⁴¹ Georges, Tintant, *op cit*, p.442

⁴² *ibid*, p.313

ment meant manual worker, after 1918, "syndicalism enlarged the notion of producers" to reflect the new reality.⁴³

The "moderates" were also aware that workers, both white collar and manual, were a minority in society and other groups and classes such as professionals, peasants and tradesmen were not about to disappear. The CGT felt these middle classes needed workers' leadership. "The workers now claim to defend the general interest of society against the ...private interests who have the state at their discretion".⁴⁴ In opposition to their previous sectarianism, the CGT abandoned the pretension of being "the sole representative of the workers to the exclusion of other organizations or social forces".⁴⁵ Hence they were now willing to work with other trade unions and mass organizations.

Democratic rights were affirmed. "Thus parliamentary democracy is no longer condemned as a trick or fraud, but on the contrary, it is the political system which assures the working class their rights".⁴⁶ A perversion of anarchist principles? But is this not similar to Fernand Pelloutier's belief that a republic was a better system for workers?

THE MINIMUM PROGRAM - SELL-OUT OR PROUDHONIST ANARCHISM?

What did the rancor-inducing Minimum Program of 1918 consist of? The generally accepted version goes like this; "The minimum program published in December 1918 was reformist in nature". The program caused the CGT to be accused of "Gomperism" and of abandoning anarcho-syndicalism.⁴⁷ There is another way of

⁴³ Lafranc, op cit, p.229

⁴⁴ Georges, Tintant, op cit, p.331

⁴⁵ ibid, p.331

⁴⁶ ibid, p.323

⁴⁷ Lieberman, op cit, p.208

looking it. One historian writing in 1931 and therefore much closer to the events, had another conception of the Minimum Program; For D. J. Saposs, the post-war CGT adopted a moderate Proudhonist program of consumer and producer co-operatives.⁴⁸ A contemporary Proudhonist, Jean Bancal, is of the opinion that Proudhon's heritage includes both revolutionaries and moderates. "Reformist syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism both asserted Proudhonist paternity."⁴⁹ Hence it would be wrong to accuse the CGT majority of abandoning libertarianism if their Minimum Program advocated Proudhonist co-operatives and not state ownership.

To help answer the question of whether the CGT abandoned anarchism or became Gomperist, one must consider the statement at the Congress of Lyon, 15 September 1919, which introduced the Minimum Program. "The idea of syndicalism will be accomplished only by the total transformation of society...its essential goal is the disappearance of the employing class and the wage earning class...categorically and without any equivocation syndicalism declares in its origins, present character and permanent ideal, a revolutionary force... We do not wish to augment the power of the state".⁵⁰

Jouhaux warned the pro-Bolshevik revolutionary minority still present at the Congress "...a revolution is as much undertaking a vast task of construction, to replace the worst by the better, to create a community for the good of all, to reconcile maximum of liberty with the collective interest".⁵¹

Such reasoning is straight out of Proudhon, who always emphasized the constructive side of libertarian social change. This conception of revolution influenced CGT thinking long after the Congress of Lyon. As the union was to write in the mid-1930's, "the idea of the general strike, which has never been abandoned,

⁴⁸ Saposs, op cit, p.44

⁴⁹ Jean Bancal, Proudhon: Oeuvres Choicies, Gallimard, Paris, 1967, p.27

⁵⁰ Lafranc, op cit, p. 227-8

⁵¹ Georges, Tintant, op cit, p.372