



European Foundation  
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**INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND THE ENVIRONMENT**  
**France**

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Working Paper No.: WP/93/08/EN

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## FOREWORD

This final version of the "Environment/Industrial Relations" report is composed as follows:

Part 1 relates to the institutional and legal framework: the reader will find some basic information here about French structures in the fields of environment and industrial relations.

In Part 11, I have summarized the main results of a survey I carried out in France in 1991, on the attitudes of French Industrialists about the environment as a general concern as well as an 'industrial relations issue. This second part attempts some 'insights' into the French 'cultural handling' of the problem.

Part 111, is dedicated to the positions adopted by the trade unions. Recent positions have been explored through some interviews and documentation, notably in the two big unions in France, the CGT (Confederation Generale du Travail) and the CFDT (Confederation Francaise Democratique du Travail).

As the Environment is still nearly non existent as an 'industrial relations' issue (i.e. a matter for bargaining), the reader will not be surprised to find no specific chapter on it, though a brief review of its appearance in the legal framework is to be found in Part 1. As there was no spontaneous hint at this problem from the 45 industrialists I met, the question barely appears in the second part of the report. It is only emerging as a wish (and not as a formal demand) in union discourses (except in the most recent period), and even then, it is still discussed as a legal and regulatory 'piece' to be adapted on to a fairly rich "working conditions" and "participation" legal apparatus.

Denis Duclos.



## INTRODUCTION

### Industrial culture and the environment in France.

The general context of the environment as a public concern in France must be recalled.

It has somehow been "stamped" by a chronic contradiction on the one hand, public concern is obviously ever more broadly shared, and more people seem ready to accept the Greens as a political alternative to the traditional Right-Left structure; but, on the other hand, there is neither any massive involvement in environmental activism nor any popular support given to specific campaigns on issues like waste recycling, water depollution or, reduction of traffic congestion. No precise criticism of industry and technology is emerging on the public stage. We are still experiencing a context of diffuse environmental concern and diffuse sympathy towards vague pro-environment ideas. Insofar as problems with industrial sites appear to be under good technical control (which is mostly the case, except some growing rumours about the bad quality of drinking water in a number of places), there is no popular impulse for "harnessing" modernity. Since recent years have been filled with managerial ideology rather than with pro-State views, the conservative positions of French Business have not known much criticism. Strangely enough, the very recent legal changes which opened the door to new rights for the workers in the field of environment have been pushed forward "from the very top" (i.e.: Brice Lalonde's Cabinet<sup>2</sup>), without any strong will among the workers' unions or environmental movements. Industrial interests were more or less taken by surprise, and did not show much enthusiasm for building up a lobby against them.

We must remember that this tendency is embedded in a French traditional 'cultural lag', according to which, societal problems are much more to be solved by regulatory and technical means than by public debate. Unions, even when they strongly oppose bureaucratic solutions, are still tied up with this cultural pattern.

#### **Industry and Environment: a "soft conflict" context.**

During the mid-seventies, the environmentalist movement emerged in France as a militant reality. As a part of the more general contest of "Rightist power", this multifaced movement mobilized very different types of activists. It was a period of active networking which favoured cross-fertilization among various small but very busy groups. Some "crossing" thus appeared between union and

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<sup>2</sup>Brice Lalonde is the French Minister of Environment.

environmental cultures (Antunes, 1978, Dumont 1974, 1975, 1978, Duclos et al, 1985). For instance, a "Syndicat du Cadre de Vie" was created (Pelisson, 1977), attempting to translate environmental demands into the semantics of a workers' union. But in general, it was more a theoretical problem for ecologist intellectuals (Conti 1978), than a practical topic. Despite these diverse attempts, one can assume that environmental movements in France have conducted very few actions addressed to the working class and unions. Besides the important exception of nuclear energy protest (Daniel 1987), there have been no real attempts to capture attention and support from union activists, even in local contests. Of course, one can find several cases where relationships between environmentalist groups and unions have been exemplary (Guerine Henni, 1981), but broadly speaking, the French ecologists did not focus often on specific industrial branches or sites. Despite the fact that the "couloir de la chimie" (chemical corridor) near Lyon has been a continuous case of scandalous pollution of the Rhone, no important contest has occurred, until very recently. On the contrary, ecologists have conducted struggles for saving wilderness areas, not so much threatened by industrial activities than by rural and urban planning (like the river Loire). This historical background must be kept in mind if we want to understand why subsequent developments will still be marked with a sort of an "apathetic" syndrom: as if, despite good intentions, workers and environmentalists definitely belonged to separate worlds, quite indifferent to each other.

**Public opinion facing industrial impacts on environment: an increasing concern... still without any precise claims.**

As the environment became in the eighties a crucial concern for the French public at large (which is attested by a convergent set of polls and different types of quantitative surveys<sup>3</sup>), the political output was maintained for a long time as a vague and long term perspective. Although the credibility of the French "Greens" has been continuously enhanced, reaching in recent months 13 to 15% of vote expectations (1991) the general public still does not seem to consider them as "real" political parties. If an ever larger number announce their intention to favour the Greens in elections, it is more in order to express their disappointment towards classical parties, rather than support for an alternative program, which is obscure and unknown<sup>4</sup>. This impression is strengthened by the unshaken

<sup>3</sup>In 1981, 43% of the French were "worried" about the nuclear plants safety. In 1990, there were 50% (CREDOC), *Consommation et modes de vie* n°62, 30 nov 1991.

<sup>4</sup>This is probably due to the state of the Green "confidential" media: the consistency of a radical change in economic criteria being very easy to discover in many texts and publications by the Greens' leaders

position of some of their most prominent leaders who declare they are not subject to classical criteria of "right" or "left" wings.

Nevertheless, the impressive results of the Polls have prompted the other political parties to develop different strategies towards the Greens: one of those being the attempt at merging the image of the Greens with the profile of extreme-rightists (Le Pen), on the basis of some "virtual" analogies and value sharing (a touch of rural conservatism, a preference for local and provincial political activity, rather than intellectual "parisian" and "cosmopolitan" centralism). The polls though show that the Le Penists have very aggressive views on ecologists. Moreover, despite the fact that the environmentalists share more values with the Left Wing (social equity, anti-racism, etc.<sup>5</sup>), it is still difficult to make clear what would be an "environmentalist industrial policy". A certain emptiness in the socio-economic dimensions of "Green" programs aggravates this difficulty of enlightening and defining the public image of the Environmentalists in France, more especially as some of them are supporting (or at least, are not hostile to) technical solutions like the High speed train (TGV) in Provence.

Meanwhile, the political potential of the environment appears to be more significant. Some industrialists are very aware of it, wondering whether a "raz-de-maree" would be possible which would drive French environmentalists even further than their German counterparts as soon as they found the "key-concepts" for being accepted as fully responsible policy makers. A few Business Journals have just become aware of the environmentalists tendency to radical global economic solutions such as taxes on polluting activities, or working time sharing. At the same time, the trade unions, still anchored in the official leftist culture, do not want to support the Greens, without daring to become too aggressive against them. Thus, they stay congealed in a 'double bind' structure: if they support environmental concerns, they may help the Greens (which they are inclined to think of as political strangers), but if they do not support it, they restrain themselves from acquiring a broader legitimacy (which they patently lack).

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<sup>5</sup> A. Waechter, the Greens' president was very clear on that point: "The national-selfishness is the complete opposite of the values supported by the Greens" (Le Monde, 24 Oct. 1991). The polls confirmed his view: 52% of the French who voted "Green" for the presidential election in 1988, came from "the left wing", 34% from "the middle", and 13% from the right wing (SOFRES-CEVIPOF, 1990).



## The "Authoritarian and technocratic temptation".

As a legal specialist has noted: the environment is still (in France as in Europe) a matter of negative and repressive action, and it does not activate a 'positive principle of the Law' (Lascoumes 1985). For example, the Code Dalloz on the environment regulations regroups 198 texts which edict penalties. But, because such a positive environmental law does not exist, those regulations are mostly dependant upon other more unified principles. Thus, environmental regulations in France become subsidiary or secondary matters, depending on other frameworks such as "acceptable pollution thresholds", "internal regulations" or other technical disciplinary procedures which have been defined previously by other bodies. Among the 198 legal texts quoted, 161 do not qualify the "infringement" by itself, but refer to other codes and other laws. Therefore, despite the long formal existence, of a consistent body of laws (Lois de juillet 1976 sur la protection de la Nature, les installations classes pour la protection de l'environnement, et de la protection de la mer, etc.), there are in fact, several "environments", related to different levels of actions, different types of agents, etc..

Notwithstanding its obvious contradiction with the 'State induced' homogeneity of Laws, this tendency facilitates the "non judicial" treatment of environmental infringements. That is to say decentralized administrations play the role of "technical judges", without sharing any basic principles.

To understand how it can work continuously, we must recall here the 'double' nature of the French State. As many sociologists or political scientists admit it, France is still a "State society" (Ewald, 1986), which does not mean that the State only has a central place in economic (Baier, 1988) or social regulations, but that the State embodies the French way of conducting a civilizing process. French people seem to socialize themselves through State identity, which means that their own diversity is reflected by the functional diversity of the state apparatus. Thus, the central power figure and the decentralized technical administrations are both sides of the same token. Determining the environment in terms of oneself rights depending on one global Law, would probably contradict the many middle range functions of control and sanction. It would also quickly unbalance the sharing of responsibilities among various technical and judicial bodies, and give the main power to attorneys at law, which is not consistent with the national tradition.

This interpretation is undoubtedly a precarious and historically relative statement, but when coming to environmental issues, it fits with other features: thus, many former environmentalists have already been absorbed in State functions, at local, regional, as well as at

national levels. The growth and multiplication of environmental administrations that we can observe today, are going in the same direction. Environmental financial agencies regulating air pollution, water pollution, waste recycling processes, forestry, national parks, Environmental inspectorates (already held by DRIRE, DIREN, DRAE, or so many other administrations) as well as new environmental policies and expert centres, will be operated by more and more specialized (both centralized and decentralized) technical bureaucracies. Very few steps have been made to give more responsibilities to citizen or public interest groups even though one acknowledges the important role that some of them have played in legal pursuits of polluters, or, in struggling for more human rural and urban planning. In turn, private entrepreneurs complain that the State usually considers them as potential polluters even if they have always operated safely and respectfully with regard to the environment. They claim new relationships based on confidence and self-promoted initiatives (De la Royere, 1989), and assume they are most frequently capable of negotiating without any State mediation with other people, namely, with environmental activists. Some companies have systematically developed interactive policies with external actors. They do not appreciate State involvement that comes too late, or in clumsy ways with frequent backlash effects that discourage industrial actors trying to turn, by their own efforts, to a more ecological identity.

Such complaints are not always fully justified: for a number of years now, the State has also emphasized incisive actions at all levels. Many "rewards", "prizes" and other awards have been organized, publicizing "environmental" behaviour among industrialists. The Ministry of Environment regularly publishes lists of "virtuous enterprises", displaying in full, technical details of their "clean" processes, and assessing the losses and gains associated with new technologies (Ministere de l'Environnement, 1984, 1988).

Conversely, the fact that the main trade unions are still very "State-minded" in France (and this, in an ever more stubborn style, probably due to side-effects of the ongoing crisis of their membership) can have contradictory impacts on this tendency: on one hand, they care for public solidarity and their members are to the fore in their deliberations which intervene on environmental issues. But on the other hand, they are not ready to accept a more generalised interaction among social actors, which would not be systematically mediated by the State (Reynaud, 1989). In that sense, the unions in France do not act to challenge business claims to negotiate with other citizens, and do not back very much the few environmentalist groups who try to act in that way. It is perhaps only among some farmers' movements (as the 'Confederation Paysanne' (Alphandery, Bitoun, Dupont, 1990) ) that the corporative side and the

environmentalist side are being articulated: for example, in claiming the reversal of rural desertification, and the promotion of new protective functions for agriculture. But such new mediating social actors are still very far from acquiring any significative role either with the industrialists, or with the trade unions.

This context must be recalled when coming to our focal point - environment as an industrial relations topic - because it explains, at least partly, the strange feeling of "artificiality", this taste of a "non existent problem", which would probably surprise any person analysing the state of the question in France from an external point of view.

## PART 1

### INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

#### FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND ENVIRONMENT IN FRANCE

##### Historical backgrounds.

Health and safety issues on one hand, environmental problems on the other, have been regulated separately in France for a long period of time, but have always been submitted to the same predominant logic of technical management by the State. The first coherent set of rules controlling industrial hazards ("*installations dangereuses*") was formed under Napoleon's administration (1810), the aim of which was to isolate dangerous sites from populated areas. Progressively, the responsibilities for inspecting those factories was attributed to more technical bodies, and in 1963, after the Feysin accident (explosion and fire in a large refinery near Lyon), it was permanently given to the "*Services des Mines*" (Mining Engineers) who have kept the job ever since. Another legacy from the 19th century is the Departmental Health council (*Conseil departemental d'Hygiene, CDH*) which helps the Prefet to take decisions in matters which are ever more connected to environmental issues. This institution under a new name is to be given the task of improving the participation of both local environmental movements, and unions.

Health and safety questions have been raised for 150 years in France, mobilizing a number of advisers and reformers (Cottureau et al, 1983, Duclos, 1984). At the beginning of the century, they were definitely treated in terms of compensation policies (Defert et al, 1977). After World War II, occupational injuries and illnesses were included in the national social security system, coming under the control of medical and technical public experts (Ewald 1986, Blassel, 1981). Yearly statistics on occupational health are published by the "*Caisse Nationale Maladie des travailleurs salaries*" (CNAMTS), from which figures are used in assessing levels of social security contributions by each plant management. On national and regional levels, CTN and CTR (*Comites techniques nationaux, et regionaux*) allow Industrialists and trade union representatives to meet about the prevention of occupational hazards, and to debate the best technical solutions. On the site level, unions participate in the control of occupational hazards through the "*Comite d'Hygiene, de Securite et des conditions de travail*" (CHSCT), but do not really deal with environmental issues, except when giving advice on problems which are, at the same time, identified as occupational health or safety problems. Until the end of 1991, there was no legal basis in France to allow workers representatives to give advice on environmental issues, but a law is in the process, following the instructions

of the Plan National de l'Environnement, which was passed in June 1991. Thus far (and still now) the unions rarely interact with industrialists on direct and explicit environmental topics, whether at the national or at the local and plant levels. When they intervene about such issues, it is within the framework of public institutions where the technical aspect is always predominant, and directly handled by engineers in official positions.

In contrast with the German situation, it can be assumed that environmental issues have practically not pervaded the structures of industrial relations in France. Although recognised as a reality by both managers and unions, the strong correlation between harmful effects on the environment and occupational risks has not until now been selected as a relevant object for negotiation between the industrial actors, except in the context of specialised segments of the State apparatus, like the Conseil Supérieur de la Prévention des risques professionnels (CSPRP), the Collège pour la Prévention des Risques technologiques (CPRT), or the Haut comité de l'Environnement (HCE). At least, one can notice that the same dangerous substances are sometimes classified simultaneously in both fields of industrial safety and environmental protection. Attempts to compare and adjust threshold values for exposure inside and outside a plant are not subject to systematic comparisons between inner and outer environments.

Because public demands on the industrial actors about the environment are always mediated by the powerful structures of administrative expertise, and also because they frequently do not address unions and managers at the same time, they are not capable of putting much pressure on industry. Therefore, public pressures are not obliging industry to comply with more respectful technologies for Man and Nature. This difficulty, to use a societal consensus on the environment as a lever to re-orientate industrial activities in France, does not mean that nothing has changed. As usual in our country, the State mechanisms react very sensitively to any variation of public opinion and begin to solve the problem, as far as the administrators feel they can keep control over the whole process, and turn it in to a technical procedure.

### **Basic national structures and laws, before 1991**

#### **State level.**

The French legal framework on both subjects (environment and occupational safety) can be considered as very elaborate and sophisticated, underpinned by frequent renewal of details. Extensive Codes and regulations in the form of standard works can be consulted (Dalloz on environment, Pluyette on occupational risks, etc.) But it is also characterized by a tendency to evade some crucial or controversial problems, and by the difficulty of

dealing with relatively complex questions, like thresholds for exposure to hazardous substances, etc..

The legal framework was mostly enriched during the sixties and the seventies, responding to the most active period of the environmental movement, before its politiazation.

For instance, we should note the following main laws:

- Air protection law (2 August 1961)
- Water protection law (16 December 1994, and Code rural a.434-1).
- Ground protection law (16 December 1964, related to the destruction of waste, and recycling of metals).
- Sea protection law (7 July 1976, and 11 May 1977).
- Nature protection law (16 July 1976).
- Classified settlements and environmental protection law (19 July 1976).
- Law on toxic waste management (1982).
- The law passed on 22 July 1987, relating to the prevention of the risk of major accidents created a special coolege on "*prevention of technological risks*" (CPRT).

Such a "*battery*" of legislation (with many further additions) has certainly had a concrete impact on the day-to-day management of industrial sites. But, we should note, for example, that the law on "*classified settlements*" (a way of saying: "*hazardous plant*") was never considered as "*real law*" by the Mining Engineers in charge of its application, because it did not recognise in enough detail their own function.

We can also assume that the obvious effort made in 1976 to co-ordinate several aspects of environmental protection was not achieved, leaving the judges to confront a diversity of rights: in some cases, "*local life conditions*" take the place of environmental values, defined otherwise as "*nature*" in general, or, an improvement of cleanliness (for an industrial site), a right of property and occupation, a power to decide, etc... Depending on the dominant metaphor used in this or that law, the right to dispose of "*public facilities*" may lead to a degradation of the natural environment, which is simply not conceived, unless another body of law could be enacted, in contradiction with the first one.

In the eighties, French legal apparatus did not change much, but was uncomfortably challenged by European instructions which were often considered redundant by

administrators as well as by industrialists. For instance, "Seveso" instructions (on assessing hazards on the site) and recent regulations (on the public "right to know") have been implemented with some criticism, managers arguing it was "more paper" for things that were already done, according to the French law.

Thus in several cases, the Law appears to be at the same time too detailed and inaccurate. Subsequently, the role of regulation tends to be very important, with a split between unenforced laws, and implementation without full legislative prescription. It is the realm of administrative autonomy and power, where the only efficient criteria tend to be technical ones.

There were some significant indications of resistant behaviour by the socialist administration, before public pressure appeared through the polls in the late eighties. Thus, a "circulaire" regulating industrial waste disposal (22 Juillet 1983) hinted at a possible consultation of CSHCT. But, as the CGT secretary L. Brovelli wrote in a letter to the Directeur de l'Eau, de la Prevention des pollutions et des risques, at the French Ministry of Environment: if not "considered as a general obligation", such a consultation would be inefficient. L. Brovelli, then, asked for a modification of the law passed 19 July 1976, which would set up a mandatory consultation of CHSCT and CE (comite d'entreprise), about every activity of the plant susceptible to having an impact on the environment. The answer of the civil servant in charge of the problem was to: call for "experimental actions" he rejected "prescribing obligation which would then be at risk of being badly adapted to a diversity of situations".

Confirming this "soft approach" when passing the "law of 22 July 1987, regarding the prevention of the risk of major accidents", the French Parliament rejected an amendment proposing the mandatory consultation of CHSCT about the preventive measures to be taken by employees.

Nevertheless, going (consciously or not) along the "technical" path, unions did not react with much aggressiveness to this "social" restraint. They generally called for scrupulous respect for regulations, which underscored their own effort to clear up and solve safety and environment problems. Besides, they favoured all types of public supervision, leading to the creation of new technical bodies. Although there is practically no admittance for workers' unions in high technology management circles where "mathematical" topics are debated (on risk assessment, etc) union representatives hold a few positions in the "Conseil Superieur des Installations Classes" (CSIC), in the "Comite Technique National of the Social Security" (CTN) or in other national bodies in charge of industrial safety, and other sectoral consultative bodies (Haut comite pour l'Environnement, Conseil Superieur de la surete et de

l'Information Nucleaire (CSSIN) etc. Therefore, unions might have had the feeling of being participants in the technocratic decision process. The authors view is that this is broadly unreal, unless we assume the 'participation' of unionists can be achieved through an implementation of their views and positions by the Technicians.

Thus, an ever more crucial role has been played by the state body the "*corps des Mines*" in the public management of both environmental and occupational hazards. This elite group of engineers (mainly polytechnicians from the "*Ecole des Mines*"), is prone to hegemonize a number of managerial positions at least in two ministries concerned with those issues:

- Ministry of Industry (responsible for handling inner industrial risks, and also for monitoring nuclear safety),

- Ministry of Environment (particularly the Industrial Environment Service, in charge of controlling industrial pollution, and directing the activities of the "*Directions de l'Industrie et de la Recherche*" - DRIR-), (Lascoumes et al 1985).

It is also in control of the "*College de la Prevention des risques technologiques*" which gives advice to the Prime Minister on topics as various as nuclear waste disposal, the contradiction between man and machine, or biotechnology hazards.

The position of the Corps des Mines (traditionally specialized in mining safety) means it is getting more and more power and expertise in what is now called "*cindynics*" ('science' of risk management) in France. It is evident that the official doctrine on safety, is perpetrated by an elite body which thinks of itself as possessing the "*scientific truth*" on every kind of risk. Any social debate with a "*non competent public*", is avoided.

In short, the State does not actually emphasise the necessity of stronger political relationships between social actors concerned with internal or external industrial dangers. The necessary unification of both problems is much more considered as a technical issue, and therefore tends to be achieved by state bodies where social partners are "*captured*" in the position of experts, and do not behave as protagonists in a societal debate. Until very recently, the State has not been much help in developing instances where unions and managers could meet directly and confront the contradictions about environmental issues.



## 2. Industrial sectors

Environmental and occupational 'vices and virtues' have not been shared equally among the industrial sectors. In fact, there is a sort of "chasm" between relatively virtuous sectors (in terms of occupational health) like chemical or nuclear industries, which are at the same time the most hazardous ones for the environment, and relatively "bad" sectors (like construction) where many workers are injured and killed<sup>6</sup> but which are relatively "benign" in terms of direct pollution impact (if we except airborne dust, and wild urbanisation effects). This gap explains, partly at least, why environmental issues are usually excluded from industrial relations in France. In the chemical and nuclear industries, workers' unions have very high standards concerning safety, but managers generally accept and comply with most of their demands. They frequently go much further, especially in multinational firms, which face constraints for failing to meet with local standards. Conversely, in the construction sector, there has been a permanent struggle for enhancing safety regulations and their implementation. Even though weakened by their precarious status, workers support the unions, and back up work inspectors (civil servants) who fight for better working conditions or simple respect of the law. But this has tended to consume all their "demanding energy", leaving nothing for more subordinate issues like the environment.

## 3. Industrial sites

In France, the industrial site is by no means the most relevant level for both environment and occupational safety, but it is an important level because of the importance of DRIR and CHSCT as well as the decentralized structure of social security and of the "Work Inspectorate".

For every site which has been classified as potentially hazardous, industrialists are required to comply with a number of rules which have to be checked directly by public engineers, gathered in "DRIR" - (Directions Regionales de l'Industrie et de la Recherche) by members of the "Corps des Mines". As many surveys have displayed, every manager in France recognizes DRIR as being the real authority regulating environmental problems at the concrete level (Roqueplo, 1988), even if their relatively small number (500) permits them to control efficiently only a part of the classified plants (several tens of thousands).

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<sup>6</sup> One thousand workers or so are accidentally killed each year in France.

The PPI (Plan Particulier d'Intervention) which is determined by the manager of a 'hazardous' plant, in discussion with the Prefet, must, according to the law, be transmitted to the general public. The POI (Plan d'operation interne - internal emergency plan) must, in turn, be known by every worker in the plant concerned.

The main local management-union institution here is the "CHSCT" (comite d'hygiene, de securite et des conditions de travail: Working Conditions, Health and Safety joint Committee), which is mandatory in every plant of 50 employees and more. The CHSCT is composed of elected workers (professional elections among candidates of union lists, occurring each three years), and management representatives. The CHSCT deals with every safety and health problem in the factory, and asks questions which must be answered by management. The workers representatives are in charge of the minutes and one serves as the secretary of the meetings ('Auroux' Laws). But even if the chairperson of a meeting is a unionist, the CHSCT statements are still subject to ratification by a management decision in order to become more than informal advice or simple questioning. Pollution or dangers to the surrounding area have often been raised by these joint committees.

Workers have no specific rights in preparing the PPI document. They are informed on the same basis as the general public. Even for the POI (Plan d'operation interne - international emergency plan), the CHSCT is not legally consulted. Moreover, workers are not directly represented in the CDH (Conseils departmentaux d'hygiene) who help the Prefet to take decisions in a health crisis in a department, whereas anglers, industrialists, deputies or town councillors are represented.

Except during inquiries in cases of serious accidents or catastrophes, meetings between DRIR and CHSCT seem to be very rare events, and more generally workers and local unions do not have much (if any) contact with environmental institutions or groups outside their plant. In some very rare cases, local authorities have organised joint meetings on the environmental impact of industry, but they cannot be considered as blueprints for a broader and steadier style of relationships.

The consultation of CHSCT on environmental issues was neither mandatory nor legally possible up to the end of 1991 in France. There was no law (in 1991) in France allowing workers or their representatives to intervene on environmental topics, but legal initiative was proceeding. However, the unionists we interviewed said "this is a good idea", because they "could at least try to have the standards more strictly applied". They added that the environment, despite the legal "gap", tends to become a "normal topic in bargaining", on the strength of the plant union. In spite of these restraints, the CHSCT

has slowly become the strategic 'pivotal' point for the extension of workers' rights on environmental issues. Even without any legal basis, the CHSCT already interferes with decisions which have some impact on the site. Indeed, surveys have for a long time shown, that questions posed by the workers representatives in CHSCT in big companies, were ever more frequently addressing environmental issues, like substances released through industrial sewage, efficiency of air filters, transportation of dangerous materials or wastes outside the plants, urban planning in the surroundings, etc..<sup>7</sup>

A number of case studies in industrial plants have indicated that most workers are very aware of professional hazards (Dodier). They are also very conscious that important damage to the environment can be generated by industrial activities. But their consciousness and actions stay mostly at the "whistle blowing" level (Duclos 1981, 1987a). One must keep in mind that it is still very difficult for a worker or an engineer to perceive clearly the "bad side" of his (or her) own job (Duclos 1987, Gardin 1987). It is not at all rare for the externalised nuisance to be used as a tool for blackmailing the management during crucial negotiations: "if you don't give us better working conditions or better wages, we tell the truth - on the environmental situation - to the media" (Duclos, 1987a). These kind of "Whistle blowing" tactics imply that a certain connivance between management and workers exists about what are "normal" conditions of production (Duclos, 1987b). Nevertheless, criteria for "normal pollution" have been more and more hardened.

Especially among the younger workers and executives, people are no longer ready to accept - without any contest - work in 'dirty plants', an ambiguous label which refers to bad working conditions as well as outside pollution. More drastic standards on energy consumption, clean processes, recycling technologies, following of toxic wastes, etc.. are always welcome by workers (as long as they do not increase internal nuisances). A new professional pride, based on safety, is undoubtedly taking the place of the old risk-taking ethic.

Unfortunately, as in Germany or other European countries, the use of a precarious and temporary (foreign) workforce for dangerous tasks (notably in nuclear and chemical industries) has maintained among labourers a certain propensity to tolerate pollution and intoxication. The virtuous effects of permanent employment are still often countered by more frequent casual jobs among young people.

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<sup>7</sup> Allan Michaud D. et D. Duclos, Syndicalisme et ecologisme, CSU-ARTE, 1984.

## Main changes 1990-1991.

Things seemed likely to remain unchanged in terms of legal structures, when the polls began to alert the Socialist Party to the fact that it was no longer possible to treat the environmental problem as a simple demagogic item. It was time for action. The Minister of Environment, Brice Lalonde considered he was capable of capturing a number of "environmental votes", provided he could show some independence from the rest of the government. He then, made two strategic moves: first, Lalonde created a "social movement" of his own - "Generation Ecologie" - and second he displayed a "Plan national pour l'Environnement", with great publicity. At a time when one of his directors told a unionist that giving more formal power to the CHSCT (in terms of environment concern) was probably premature, the group in charge of elaborating the "plan", took more radical positions which drove the Parliament to pass it in 1990, with remarkable speed.

We can summarize the Eight Principles of Action of the PNE (Plan National pour l'Environnement, passed in June 1990):

- The quality of the environment is to be taken as an important goal in the global policy.
- The reduction of risks and costs must be achieved by prevention and innovation, rather than by "ante-post" decisions.
- A more severe enforcement of existing regulations and standards must be set up.
- "Partnership" must be used as a general means to deal with environmental problems at each level.
- Improvement of knowledge and competences are the pre-conditions of a real improvement: credible data and figures serve as a basis for political decisions.
- Democratization of public choices must be developed at every level (in order to control the "technocratic temptations").
- Equity and solidarity must be introduced in the environmental debate: Ecology is a "social inequity" reducing (or aggravating) factor. The PPP (Polluter pays principle) must be more strictly enforced, and it must be extended to other selected actors.
- International networking is a necessity, and we must consider as a duty a real contribution to the "sustainable development" goal.

Thus stated, the objectives of the PNE were not quantified, except for the following aspects:

- within ten years reducing the nitrate ratio in continental waters down to the European standard: 50mg/l

- doubling purification and sanitation processes: the subsequent increasing of water prices being partly absorbed by the extension of the PPP to farmers and to other social actors.

- By 1995, hazardous substances released in the sea would be reduced by one half; Toxic waste in the sea would be completely stopped.

Within 10 years, 25% of the CO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub> and classical air pollutants must be suppressed, as well as 100% of the CFE.

The "Seveso directive" (European instruction regulating hazardous industrial plants) was to be extended to many more sites, and to biotec-laboratories, dams, water purification units, intensive breeding farms, etc.

5 Billion Francs (5000,000,000), were to be dedicated to housing for sound-proofing improvements: noise being popularly considered, as a main source of nuisance.

Environmental public expenditures were to be increased by 50% in 1995, and 100% by the end of the century: currently representing 1,3% of the PNB, it will thus reach 2% or so.

The PNE also provided for a number of new institutions, or renewal of existing ones:

- The creation of DIREN (Directions regionales de l'environnement) gave local instruments to the Ministry of Environment which, had previously been consisted only of a central administration (only 200 civil servant belonging to the specific "environmental administration")

- An official "environmentalization" of the Industrial Inspectorates (DRIR: directions regionales de l'industrie et de la recherche) thus far, under the Ministry of Industry's wing, and which, therefore, became DRIRE (...et de l'environmet), and subject to a common control by Industrial and Environmental Administrations.

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<sup>8</sup> A Waechter, the leader of the French Greens said about the PNE, it "is essentially based on taxes. The tax system might, indeed, help to change behaviours, but under the current economic conditions, it is quite clear that Ms. Beregovoy (Minster of Economy), Charasse (Minister of the Budget) etc., cannot agree with the plans of M Lalonde. In the same way, he can only be in conflict with the rest of the government on transportation policy, or about urban and rural planning. (Le Monde 10.8.1991, P Jarreau: "Deux victoires pour les verts")

Technical and Financial agencies (supposed to collect taxes from polluters) were reunited: The AFME (discouraging energy spending), the AQA (controlling the air quality), the ANRED (helping to form a waste recycling policy) became parts of a AEME (Agence de l'Environnement et de la maîtrise de l'Energie), the main specific fee and tax collector in the field of environment. More consistency is expected from this regrouping, along with more "convincing" power.

Two research centres completed this renewed public mechanism:

- One on risk issues (regrouped already existing centres coal, and petrochemical): the INEIRIS.
- The second on Environmental Data: The IFE (Institut français de l'Environnement), which became the French Counterpart of the European Environmental Agency. This might be a real innovation, data being thus far collected by private and fairly small institutes whose credibility was frequently questioned.

Among other institutional changes, we can cite:

- Environmental regional assessment committees.
- Departmental water and environment councils (Conseil départemental de l'eau et de l'environnement) taking the place of the Departmental Health Council: DRH, in which Workers unions will be represented.
- a mandatory "environmental assessment" to be published by industrialists.
- A national "College de l'Environnement" in charge of establishing an annual assessment on the Environment in France (which up to now was done by the ministry of Environment).

And last, but not least, our key change: the extension of CHSCT services to environmental topics.

Having publicly threatened his socialist friends that he would send in his resignation, if he did not get any help to enforce and finance his plan, Lalonde was at least successful in having it passed in Parliament without too many changes.

But it seems more likely that these quick improvements were the direct effects of the polls, and not the result of popular pressure on such special items as the right of unions to be consulted on environmental issues...

## PART 11

### French management and the environment.

#### 1. an overview.

A merging of public opinion on environmental issues is not forecast in France, at least not before a long period of time. But even separately, each actor has made noticeable moves toward a new standard of care and consciousness. During the late eighties, the big French companies reconstructed important financial resources and a number of industrial investments were directed to modernise production processes, in the sense of better quality and less pollution at each stage. At the same time, a fragile balance between indebtedness and growth has driven many managers to use new flexible instruments, which frequently lead employees to feel more insecure. This, in turn, incites people to behave with more ambiguity, at the same time being very responsive to environmental problems, but cautious not to raise useless conflicts with their employers. As "*Union Power*" (G. Adam, 1983) is no longer a reality, workers tend to be less creative in terms of societal projects. Many of the new jobs in the last 10 years in France have been created in very small enterprises, who have no real possibility of attending to environmental issues, and at the same time attempt to avoid any unionization among their employees.

Managers also face an ambiguous challenge: they have, indeed, to choose between two very different policies. On one hand they can think of the Environment as a new milch-cow. A main trend in "*environmental industry*" has to do with companies which specialise in environmental prevention, protection, or repair. The role of some big French companies (like la Lyonnaise des Eaux, ou la Generale des Eaux) in the management of water purification processes is now internationally acknowledged. So also the new bio-chemical technologies in less intensive Agriculture, etc. The impressive growth of such a sector (Drouet 1987), nevertheless, must be interpreted with some caution because there is no evidence that a significant part of those activities will not grow in a parallel direction with negative effects on the environment! For instance, purification of water or waste disposal technologies depend on the extensive pollution of ground waters. One could forecast such economic distortions in the context of global warming, with the establishment of industries which will specialise in protecting coastal areas from rising sea level, or with industrial farming going along with better weather in specific regions.

Let us examine how the French industrialists are thinking about all these perspectives and opportunities, and how

far they deal with the environment as a question they must also debate with their employees.

**2. The environment as an "industrial relations" issue: going "green": yes.**

**Debating the environment with unions: why?**

In a survey carried out in 1991 on the views of French industrialists concerned by environmental problems.<sup>9</sup> I found the way in which management relates to the actuality of environmental hazards and pollution is heavily influenced by their symbolic frame of reference. Their definition of what represents a source of pollution of a hazard, or of what makes a risk acceptable or not, is closely related to judgments they pass on others, such as the public or the press, or how well their image comes out of a confrontation with other countries, industries or trades, and to the strength of corporate or class identities. Even the economic motive, i.e. the computable gains or losses involved, appears to be of secondary importance (in spite of management's assertion of a so-called 'industrial logic') compared to their philosophy of the social and natural world.

What, then, is the philosophy? Is it moving fast to integrate the environmental imperative? Is French management more and more heedful of the environment or has it remained indifferent to it? Is French management ready to include the environmental issue as a part of standardised industrial relations processes? Such are the issues which we address now.

The answers to these questions provided by French industry are of two types: some claim that environmental issues have always been a subject of concern, while others believe that concern for the environment has been drastically revived over the past few years.

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<sup>9</sup> The survey included 45 interviews with managers and higher executives of French companies, around 10 interviews with officials from French and European professional organisations, and another 10 with officials from government agencies involved in relationships with industry. The literature about the recent symposia on the subject was investigated, as was the literature published by the companies about their own policy or the general orientation of their sales departments in the field concerned. The 32 firms approached are all among the top 500 listed in the directory published by the magazine *Le Nouvel Economiste*, with 18 belonging to the public or nationalised sector. For reasons of confidentiality - imperatively requested by the interviewees - we did not name people or companies surveyed, although in some cases the institution selected can easily be identified on account of its position of near-monopoly in its field. On the other hand when the positions of the organisations concerned were expressed in public documents or at conferences, we quote their name.



## A long-standing concern?

The following quotation is typical of the introductory remarks made by many of the managers interviewed:

"The consideration of environmental issues by companies manufacturing and marketing consumer goods is not that recent. It dates back to the 1945 to 1975 period. Manufacturing processes and production sites were then the main areas of environmental concern. That was duty and obligation. We have factories which do not pollute at all. We have recommendations for controlling all sorts of pollution. A whole collection of measures was taken which very noticeably reduced pollution levels." (Chairman of the French branch of a large chemical firm, spring 1991).

This type of opinion has led various 'think tanks' on subjects of corporate concern to develop a very positive conception of industrial history. According to *Entreprise et Progress*<sup>10</sup>, for instance, "In the seventies, companies usually established a strong link between safety and care for the environment. They adopted an attitude focussed on the improvement of processes and the reduction of the most obvious sources of pollution. They began processing toxic fumes, fighting river pollution or waste storage.(....) In spite of economic constraints in these times of crisis, financial plans were set up, extending over several years." "(...) Far greater efforts have been made since 1987. The emphasis has been on a better coordination between industry and research. Companies (...) have developed rigorous methods to improve their knowledge of hazardous concentration thresholds, different types of toxicity, risk classification or recycling processes. They have set up environment departments sometimes headed by thirty or forty specialised engineers working on a separate budget. These departments proclaim their environmental ethics and now formulate their objectives in very clear operational terms (...) of which the following recommendations provide a few examples: "A reliable impact survey is to be obtained before any product can be manufactured." "The marketing of products who's manufacturing causes pollution should be stopped systematically whenever the said pollution cannot be eliminated"

"(...) The general state of mind of industry is to work towards pollution-free factories, controlled-impact products and processed waste, by making the necessary investments even if the costs involved are high."

In reality however, things have not gone that smoothly. A split has appeared, for instance, in the world of industry, between, on the one hand, attitudes of mere dismissal of the pollution charge, and on the other,

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<sup>10</sup> L'Entreprise et l'Environnement, in: *Entreprise et Progres*, January, 1990.

attitudes of active pollution control. At first this did not seem to be a split between specific types of companies. But the slight differences of opinion between the French employers' union (CNPF: Conseil National du Patronat Francais<sup>11</sup>) which although it agreed that environmental problems should be taken into account, remained cautious about the environmental labelling of products, contrasted with the management of the nationalised chemical companies eager to demonstrate their excellence in the environmental field between 1981 and 1985, pointed to a split in attitudes between small or medium-sized companies and large corporations. On the other hand, in each sector accused of polluting, industrial fronts appeared, fiercely opposed to the anti-pollution campaigns, and began lobbying like their American counterparts to halt any drastic measures which may have been on the agenda. Also the polluting plants themselves, whether they were attacked and openly pointed out by local coalitions or merely long known to pollute, resisted and denied with greater force than the industrial group which they were part of.

In all cases there never was a smooth shift from one attitude to the other. There were about-turns and sudden swings in industrial philosophy after long periods of stability. In almost all the interviews, however, the most common attitude was one of denial of the alleged pollution. French industrialists tend to complain that they are disliked and misunderstood, and under attack from an irrational public, a thoughtless media and irresponsible idealists. They come across to others, or at least to the sociologists, as harsh and strident critics of everybody other than themselves, including other sectors of industry, even sometimes of their immediate competitors within their own field.

The collection of interviews voicing such criticism has proved so large and varied as to lead us to interpret the string of negative judgments passed about others by the heads of industry - courteous as they may be in interpersonal relationships - as the symptoms of an unsolved problem: that of the personal challenge for an industrialist of having to identify with a rather difficult and uncomfortable role which he is institutionally assigned. The most likely explanation is that industrialists, because they do not discuss the legitimacy of their actions directly with the public, but invest the public space by means of the silent instrument of induced consumption, assume from the outset that their activity breaks the age old rules of civility. Since industrialists consider that they have no alternative (some will say "if I don't advertise, my company will die"), this leads them to ignore the original illegitimacy of their actions (if one is to talk with the public, one has to resort to words, producing is not enough) and react violently to whoever reminds them of this distressing fact. The aggressiveness of

industrialists towards others (except of course when they are seeking to win over the consumer) can thus be seen as an assertion of their usefulness and legitimacy. "After all", their attitude aptly suggests, "if my products are as illegitimate as all that, why do you, the public, go on mass consuming them?"

Indeed, nobody can disregard the fact that each one of us contributes to modernity. In this sense the widespread accusation of irresponsibility made by industry against those who hold up the environment as an obstacle in the way of its action should be taken seriously. But on the other hand industry cannot go on behaving as if one could ignore the fact that it has the near-monopoly of invading the public space through the silent and effective medium of the product, and that this position causes a bias in communication and sometimes makes it impossible to respond.

The 'aggressiveness' of industrialists should therefore be seen as a challenge to the function of supposedly useful production. It signals a contradiction written into the global culture between the official pattern of functional roles for all and the reality of radical dissymmetries between certain actors, such as the productive institutions and the citizens. In the final analysis this aggressive attitude calls for consideration of other references of the social exchange. If industrial production was required to comply with broad technological agreements, it would no longer leave management alone to face the dilemmas of organisational choice. But such a change would mean a drastic modification of the industrial conception of "rights of controlling the production goals and means". In the French context, it would necessarily drive the industrialists to share some of these rights with workers and consumers, and, therefore, to begin merging those two strictly separate categories. But of course, this sharing (and above all, this merging) are not "on the Agenda". I could even say that it is for a number of persons interviewed, still "out of the question". To allow worker representatives to debate on environmental impacts of production processes is considered by most French industrialists, both as a "truism" (i.e. being a natural part of normal day-to-day professional conversations) and as a "useless formal and legal constraint" (coming to the point of legalizing 'workers' rights' on that matter: "unions are not representing local inhabitants".) The main idea is that industrial management in France is

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<sup>11</sup> L'Environnement et l'Entreprise: la France au sein de l'Europe de 1992, published jointly by the CNPF (biggest employers' union), the Department of the Environment, and the French committee for the European Year of the Environment, Paris, 1988. Also read: Le livre vert de l'Industrie. (the Green book of Industry), CNPF, 1991.

totally responsible for decisions determining the production organisation, this principle having been proved very efficient in the past.

We must note this position has never degenerated into a conflictual argument, for a simple reason: unions have never, on their side, attempted to use the environmental issue as a serious industrial relations theme. Paradoxically enough, the question has been very recently passed (December 1991) in the Senate Assembly (let us remember the French Legislative Institutions are bicameral), which is supposed to be much more "right wing" than the Deputy Chamber. The CNPF representatives I contacted in that period said they were "very worried about legal modifications which would turn upside-down the principle of industrial responsibility". As a matter of fact, they seemed to be fairly surprised, and showed some inability to "lobby" as efficiently as usual, being obviously unprepared to react firmly and consistently against a proposal which had not been pushed forward previously, neither by the administration, nor by the workers' unions!

These latest events confirm the fact that French industrialists may be headed for a "brutal" landing, after two decades of autocratic style and autistic representation of their own history of environmental behaviour. This somewhat cruel picture of environmental industrial history needed to be drawn to guard the reader against the current tendency of many employers' organisations to rebuild history as a mere series of preparatory steps towards the positive consideration of environmental issues, all more "spontaneous" and "self-conscious" than others.

Of course the examples quoted are verifiable and there is some measure of truth in the current optimistic climate. Moreover such retrospective wishful thinking can be useful to secure a mobilization and 'positive orientation' effect. Also one may agree that the public, both individually and collectively, has now been roused to awareness. to mention only the problem of waste, many companies have joined in the research of organisations such as GECOM (Groupe d'Etude pour le Conditionnement Moderne) or ERRA (European Recovery and Recycling Association) and are beginning to study environmental issues in all their technical and legal aspects. However a militant, committed interpretation of history, useful as it may be, should not be mistaken for the objective description of the past. The history of the relationship between industry and the environment has not been a peaceful one, even if it may seem useful, after the event, to claim that it has. It has been difficult, aggressive, sometimes dreadful. This should not be forgotten, if one is to consider the course of future events with clear mindedness.

## A recent conversion.

The recent willingness of companies (so recent that we saw it grow during the course of our survey) to make statements about the environment seems to have had a real impact. Since the Brundtland report and international conferences on the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect, the environment has become an official common asset, an indivisible whole. A close link has been established between major accidents, environmental protection, climatic change and the protection of resources for the future, thus leading to a new definition of the responsibility of industry in connection with the concept of 'sustainable development'.

In the English-speaking world (at which I hint here, because it has frequently been taken as exemplary in French business journals, as well as in Trade union newspapers), it cannot be denied that large companies have shown ever greater interest in environmental issues over the past two or three years. Dupont de Nemours has withdrawn from the production of CFC's - while emphasising that this activity brought in a yearly \$750 million - because it might affect the quality of the atmosphere (ATOCHEM the French CFC producer was very impressed by this example: but did not follow it..) Mc Donald's has become a champion of waste recycling (the company produces millions of tons of paper and plastic waste scattered by the consumers of the 18 million meals served daily in the U.S.A. alone). In Britain the company has begun recycling its polystyrene containers and most of its paper napkins are now made of recycled paper. Also it is carrying out a vast educational campaign to train consumers not to throw the empty packages just anywhere. In contrast with such examples, the French "fast food" companies have been somehow reluctant to develop such "moralist" educational campaigns.

A certain sense of "decency" has also restrained French Industrialists from advertising too loudly their good practices. When the 3M company invested in hundreds of pollution controls that went far beyond legal requirements, everybody had to know it! Procter & Gamble mentioned on its products sold in supermarkets: "*Share in our involvement in environmental protection - this washing powder is packaged in 100% recycled paper*". The same company then offered a fabric softener to be mixed in a re-useable plastic container: "*Better for the environment, less to throw away*" said the ads. The challenge in this "green image" was not understood by French companies, until recently. Assuming that French Customers would not be as highly sensitive to environmental motivations as German, Britons or Americans, they did not make any quick move, whereas firms such as Colgate Palmolive, Arco and Lever Brothers, 3M or Sunoco, did not hesitate to base their campaigns on

the idea that buying from them would help to protect the environment. Shops selling skin care products informed customers about the ozone level and global warming of the planet. All Body Shop employees were required to spend half a day a week doing environmental work. The Body Shop chain collected a million signatures in 1988 on a petition requesting that the President of Brazil should save the tropical forests. In France, this example was only followed by a few companies. For instance, the "Monoprix" supermarket chain did the same, and even more: they allowed the activists of the Green party to collect funds and membership in their Stores!

In practice "green strategies" remained rare and isolated until 1989, and in any case, there was some delay in comparison with other industrialised countries; delay which revealed some degree of misunderstanding of the "environmental stake". Things began to change on a significant scale in 1989. Since 1989 - Year of the Environment - there has been a chorus of virtuous environmental commitments in the industrial world in France, conducted by the media. In February, 1989, an inquiry sponsored by the French Department of the Environment and financed by the Gas Board found that 50% of the six hundred French industrialists polled considered that the environment had become a major preoccupation and 76% thought that contributing to protect the environment was crucial to their corporate image. More recently, at a forum organised by the International Chamber of Commerce, chaired by Peter Wallenberg and including 170 heads of multinational companies such as Electrolux, Henkel, IBM, Shell, BP, Norsk-Hydro, Mitsubishi, Tokyo Electric Power etc., it was loudly proclaimed that the common goal was to combine a sound environment with the smooth running of business, The French government, which until then had remained cautious, was jumping onto the bandwagon. Mr Fauroux, The Minister of Industry, announced his intention of "turning industry green" by proposing an environmental charter whose purpose was to develop training, promote environmental technologies through ANVAR (French national agency for the development of research), an "ideas contest" with a 30-million Franc budget, and improvement contracts in each industrial sector. Mr Fauroux also recommended that concrete steps be taken for the underground storage of industrial waste. Public commitments and environmental statements of intent were making good progress, as evidenced by the appearance of slogans such as 'total quality product' or 'public-spirited company'.

Since 1989, change in management's perception on environmental risk is impressive: environmental safety has become a "must" as part of managerial discourse (Duclos, 1990a, Tramier, 1989). In the Car industry, following the example of Volvo's President, some managers dare to express openly their doubts about expanding the number of individual motor vehicles in urban contexts

(Levy, 1990). Mostly in big companies, environmental quality is now taken into account as a full criteria for economic assessment (Laufer, 1989, Manuel, 1990). Although special environmental skills or knowledge are not yet requested for hiring their engineers, many companies call for pin-point expertise in risk assessment and environmental impact. A new consulting sector is emerging supported by legal obligations for assessment. Some big enterprises (in Petro-chemicals or Energy production sectors mainly) have also developed their own research staff on specific environmental issues (Marvillet, 1989, Tramier, 1989). Some companies are now, very proudly, proposing sophisticated methodologies for assessing and preventing diffuse or accidental pollution. Some of them have even fixed up "environmental indicators" which can be followed plant by plant on a yearly basis (Salamitou, 1989).

At the level of Industrial Associations, environment has also become a common place issue. But the emphasis on it is very different among organisations. As we have noticed, the CNPF (Conseil national du patronat français) is still resisting a strong commitment, whereas business "think tanks" can be very avant-garde in that matter. Some industrial federations (as in chemicals - the "Union des Industries Chimiques" -, or steel industry) are particularly busy with new approaches, both defensive and pro-active. They are generally involved in ethical propositions which are discussed at international levels. A number of helpful checklists (of "good environmental behaviour", of decisive criteria for assessing an environmental orientation of the company, etc.) are circulated by those groups who play an important role in spreading new concepts and methods among reluctant "middle size" industrialists. More broadly, the "bigger" are the companies participating in those clubs, the more advanced and detailed are their propositions. On the contrary, federations representing small enterprises tend to be more defensive and prone to negative reaction to ecology criticisms.

But, the burden of the cultural lag is still there. The technical enthusiasm has a counterpart: some industrialists are so certain of the technical qualities of their products and manufacturing processes, that they feel insulted by demands to submit it to "labelling" criteria. More generally, French manufactures are still particularly slow at understanding the opportunities of selling "green products" as well as perceiving the dangers of being vulnerable from that point of view (cf the Perrier affair). In some specific cases, like the nuclear industry, the managers can even stand on stubborn negative positions about ecologists (Lenny, 1989), criticism they don't seem to consider contradictory with the praise of the environmental qualities of their own activity. Nevertheless, let us assume that such behaviour is more and more isolated, because of the strength of the "new wind".

## Why are the industrialists changing?

The managers interviewed suggested five possible explanations for this new situation that prompts industrialists to 'change gears' in environmental matters, whether they want it or not.

Three of these have to do with the social environment, which is increasingly distrustful and aggressive towards industry: the increased political power of the environmental movement, the irrationality of the public and its fears heightened by ill-controlled scientific alarms, and ever greater pressure brought to bear by the regulatory authorities. Of course, the Unions are never quoted as sources of significant pressure.

Two further explanations concerns the industrialist: firstly there are natural sources of virtuousness built into the structure of organisations (the growing internationalization of companies requires all firms to align themselves with the highest standards, and companies all proclaim their new technological potential to be well under control) and secondly environmental soundness is increasingly seen as a competitive factor between companies. This is, of course, a more ambiguous and unsettling reason for being concerned about the environment (an example of this can be found in the most revealing issue of "environmentally sound" seals affixed to products, which a major part of French management is firmly opposed to).

Here again, there are two radically different interpretations of the reasons why the present situation has led to a heightening of environmental awareness. According to some of the interviewees, the notion of environmental protection has emerged because the economic crisis has come to an end, whereas a second, seemingly larger group, considers that environmental concern is part of a broader context of overall anxiety<sup>12</sup>. Thus the way in which the context of stronger environmental motivation is seen separates two groups of interviewees: those who of their own accord (without any influence coming from the unions) have decided to worry about the environment, and those to whom environmental concern is imposed as an external force.

In the final analysis this split illustrates the basic question put to industry by the environment: can a company 'internalize' environmental problems? Can it achieve perfect production from cradle to grave without

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<sup>12</sup> "We follow the discussion in anxiety, because there are many conflicting arguments and it is difficult to tell what is true and important. . . Is peoples health at stake or the planet at risk? Are there tendencies to hinder free movement?" (the chairman of a food company)



jeopardizing its profit? For an individual, the notion of citizenship refers to his relationship to the 'city', i.e. the social whole he considers himself to belong to, usually the nation. What city can a firm refer to then, that might grant it rights to pollute, however limited?

### **The cultural forces at work.**

When researching the factors which determine the attitude of industry to the environment, I believe that one should first reject the idea - however tempting - of grading firms just as one grade pupils at school, in the hope that the shame felt by those at the bottom will urge them to improve their performance by appealing to a healthy spirit of competition. This is a moralistic approach which ignores the cultural and economic specificities of individual companies.

According to certain analysis for instance, corporate behaviour can be simplified to the response to various institutional pressure factors, such as major accidents, pollution, a new awareness of public opinion, a tightening of regulations, increased eco-taxes improved coordination between national and international levels, government action ect <sup>13</sup>.

According to this theory there are three types of responses to such events. The first, known as 'green marketing', takes care over the image of the company and changes products and processes after the event in pursuit of popularity. The second adapts to new market requirements and regulations. The third, known in the U.S as 'proaction', anticipates future developments in the environmental field. Companies can henceforth be classified into different groups according to which type of attitude is predominant in their behaviour. Such groups include the 'deaf', the 'followers', the 'opportunists', the 'stars' and the 'perceptive'. We developed a similar classificatio of our own: the 'impervious', the 'observers', the 'adaptive' and the 'virtuous'. However one of the problems in this type of grouping is that every large company is likely to fall into all categories at once if one looks in turn at all the different aspects of its policy.

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<sup>13</sup> This type of grading, which has long been practised in the US, especially for non-polluting manufacturing processes, by advocacy groups such as the Environmental Defense Fund or the Council for Environmental Quality, now tends to build compound indexes including the products. Such classifications can be found in the recent survey carried out by BIPE on 'green marketing' or the investigations by Franklin R&D on 'socially responsible' investment efforts (Fortune, February 12 1990, p. 27) Also the auditing survey carried out in late 1989 by TRES (Touche Ross Europe Service) with interviews of 90 large industrial companies of the EEC about their environmental efforts, which captures little more than the formal intentions of industrial actors.

All one achieves in such a classification is a determination of the presence or absence of clear statements by the company in one area or another. Building a model, on the other hand, would require incorporating all the statements made by management or printed in official documents into a coherent strategy. This amounts to denying the basic contradictions connected with the organisation of each firm and the intrinsic limits of sales arguments. If one tries however to fit a company's strategy as a whole into a simplified logic, one runs the risk of arriving at false conclusions. Defining the behaviour of Rhone Poulenc, for instance, as a 'massive mediatization' cannot account for all the different aspects of the company's policy. One is finally reduced to interpreting sales brochures, which is of very limited interest both to scientists and management.

If, on the other hand, one takes a closer look at the statements made by the heads of industry, one finds that their different (or similar)<sup>14</sup> attitudes to the environment depend on circumstances and are often selective, inconsistent and extremely variable, whether in the area of prevention or in reverting to more hazardous practices. In short there are no simple and universally applicable criteria to distinguish between pro - and anti - environment companies. What one finds within each company is a constellation of forces in motion.

Seen from this angle, a firm - curiously - does not appear as a unified whole but as the scene of a wrestling match between different notions of risk and of the environment which are themselves supported by different professional and social groups. These groups combine and confront each other, negotiate points of strategy which they use as bargaining counters, in the same way as different political parties share a city between themselves through their respective development plans. We often encountered at least five such groups: the product-men (concerned with a certain technological or productive process), the finance-men (concerned only with profitability, especially in the short and medium term), the house-men (concerned with the firm considered as the global, long-lived unit to which they owed allegiance), the communication-men (concerned with all-out seduction), the class-men (concerned with defending hierarchical levels), etc.. Usually the management of the company arbitrates between the rival points of view, or, more accurately confers managerial power on a system of influence in which each of the above-mentioned groups has a different weight. Thus one could say that at any given moment a company is run by a coalition dominated by the class-men, or the product-men, or the salesmen. One

<sup>14</sup> The fact, for instance, that 94% of company heads consider environmental protection a priority (November, 1989 poll by Le Republicain Lorrain/Prisme) or goal of prime importance (November, 1989 poll by SOFRES) reflects little more than the wish to be in tune with the times.

possible implication of this would be to consider that a better relationship to the environment could be achieved by bringing to power a group interested in protecting it, or by forming a coalition able to silence as far as possible those groups which are indifferent to it. But it is not certain that any one of the rival groups will be more sensitive than the others to the environment and will not merely favour its own narrow views on the question.

Among the contrasting approaches investigated, that of the product-men is often rather defensive (it draws heavily on military metaphors to describe the plot against the industry) and offers positive technological solutions to the problem.

According to the product-men a criticism of industrial pollution is inadmissible as such, because it is in the nature of industry to favour a reactive-type action. I gradually found out that it is not only the economic argument that underlines this conception of progress which my interviewees felt so strongly about. Theirs is a heroic vision of technology, which has to triumph both over nature and competition, the former untamed, the latter unforgiving. The defensive metaphors are not only a stylistic device, they express a deep-seated belief. The idea that nature is a friend or that negotiation is necessary between environmental actors is first experienced by the product-men as a distressing split between different visions of the world, even if they later endorse such opinions. I found, as I had already discovered in earlier surveys<sup>15</sup> that both industrialists and engineers feel their actions to be legitimate because they are protective. They are useful and good actions as they enable the system to resist a wild and aggressive environment. Of course man attacks nature, but only in order to defend himself against it: *"the progress of civilization results in the manufacturing of many drugs and other products whose purpose is by definition toxic. In order to defeat disease, a drug has to attack germs. In order to protect the crops, a pesticide has to destroy harmful insects. In order to protect the forests, the germs that attack wood have to be killed. Man's duty is to take up the challenges of progress, but he must do so without harming nature and life"*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> D Duclos, L'Ingenieur face au risque, Sociologie du travail, XXXI-3 1989.

<sup>16</sup> J.R.Fourtou, chairman of the Rhone Poulenc group, Editorial, in: Presence, June, 1989, page 3

Positive action for the protection of the environment is thus possible. We can handle the environment just as we successfully handled plant security and safety, by means of figures, measurements, sophisticated devices, instrument panels. This leads to statements like: "The monthly evolution of the environment index has been minus 22% over the past fifteen months." However such measurements do not necessarily have an altogether rigorous meaning. As one official put it, above all what one is saying is "I am measuring". The reference to figures allow 'operationalization' by means of which industry proves both to itself and to others that the purpose of its existence is to function efficiently. However the biggest paradox in this commitment of industry, which benefits the cause of the environment, is that no sooner has the environment been reduced to an operationalizable parameter than it disappears altogether, swallowed up in the productive routine. The problem is then to find out whether what disappears in this way, are only those elements that the model takes into consideration, or the complex and unpredictable reality of pollution.

Coming to the Industrial relations issue, The Product-men paradigm is also somehow paradoxical: on one hand, it is very close to the CGT discourse which can really be considered as its "translation" in union language; but on the other hand, it is firmly opposed to any kind of sharing of power and information with unions, especially when the unions are taking positions about "external issues" such as consumption and environment.

The position of house-men offers a subtle variation from that of the first group. They, too, are offended by the criticism levelled at their action. However this is not because they feel that it threatens their role, but because they consider that it unjustifiably denies that their company has always taken great care of the environment and has always applied its ethics to this area, as well as all other areas. This position is what makes house-men favour the idea of an ethical control of technology and mistrust automated solutions. They put greater trust in the human factor: they accept the need to share information with workers organisations, provided that those debates remain "internal" and more or less informal.

Communication-men are less close to house-men (they constantly have to counteract the negative and deceitful effects of house narcissism) and have a relationship of both connivance and conflict with product-men. When defending the product and image, they come up against the arguments of outside actors, which are not all to be dismissed as reactions of ignorance and emotionalism. In fact, intellectuals, arbitrators, or activists likely to originate or relay criticism levelled at industry are among the prime targets of seductive pollution-control campaigns. The model for such campaigns is provided by

the experience of in-house industrial relations especially in those companies which pride themselves on lessening the spirit of class antagonism. In the case of industrial disputes, the aim is to 'absorb the impact of criticism' without however ignoring it or questioning its validity, and if possible by anticipating the problem. It is probably in this field that communication policies have best been developed on a local scale. In Toulouse, for instance, three companies, SNPE CDF-Chimie and Tolochimie, all integrated into the urban fabric, have developed communication strategies directed at opinion relays. In the Sanofi-Chimie company in the French town of Sisteron, the emphasis has been placed on training executives and particular consideration has been given to the firm's relationship with an organisation of troublesome old-age pensioners who were questioning the processing of phosgene deposits. In Grenoble, the haulage company Coing worked with Rhone Poulenc and in meetings with various external partners promoted the idea of an ethical code for the transportation of hazardous substances.<sup>17</sup>

Among some of these cases, some display the possibilities of coordinating information processes with the Unions are displayed. Provided the Management respects a certain degree of "identity" and autonomy: then, the unions conduct their own campaigns inside and outside the plant, on similar patterns. But in other cases, the call for external "public groups" participation has been felt as insulting by Union organisations. It is obvious that the "managerial style" (we have called it the "communication-men" style) is facing the risk of being interpreted by union as a challenge to their own "social" function.

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<sup>17</sup> Doc. GERIC, 1989.

Thus, the environment has begun to emerge as an institutional position in many big private or public companies. But it is not clear whether - in the manager's mind - it is related to industrial relations or not. In some firms, a new "Department of Environment" is tied up with international relations. In others, it is correlated with "Communication" and dedicated to produce the most convincing "green" image as possible. In others, it is associated with internal safety. But this last pattern, which is by no means the most frequent, does not imply that relationships with workers organisations are prevailing for those problems. On the contrary, I have the impression that this last environment/security type emphasises the technical - and repressive - side of risk prevention. Obviously, environment is a topic about which French managers try to avoid a confrontation with workers representatives, as if there was still a "taboo" in allowing workers to debate industrial outputs. But as long as this trend is not challenged by the workers themselves, it can go on without any serious constraint.

The appearance of environmental issues in the forefront of corporate concern has thus resulted in a confrontation - which has aroused mixed reactions - between different logics. This can be seen in its impact on organisations. From this point of view, according to the evidence provided by several representatives in each company surveyed, four features seem to characterize corporate environmental policy:

(i) the environment is increasingly considered as a question that should be the responsibility of a department;

(ii) however companies are not prepared to create independent environment function, and are not sure to which department it should be attached. At present it is attached either to the technical department responsible for plant safety, or to the 'communication and marketing' department, or to the legal and public relations department. These differences show that environmental concern arises within structures of varying power depending on the company.

(iii) companies are even less prepared to vest real power of decision or hierarchical power in those responsible for the environment, whose job fluctuates between a high-level, coordinating and impetus-giving function and low-level role of adviser to general management.

(iiii) companies are not prepared to tolerate the legal introduction of "workers rights" to know the impact of production on the environment, and even less to the legal basis of workers proposals on these topics.

## A cultural change underway

What struck me most in this survey was the impression I had of witnessing a real-time cultural conversion of industrial officials. Whatever their position in the company, they are now led - as citizens - to acknowledge a whole set of facts, however painful this may be.

First they acknowledge the reality of pollution, past or present, as an integral part of their activity. They also acknowledge in their statements the existence of a potential risk and the responsibilities which it entails. Generally the risk acknowledged is connected with the activity of each sector or trade, and everybody mentions the hazards connected to their own sector, so that the statements collected throughout the interviews form a remarkably homogeneous series.

"One essential point is of course the 'maximum' accident. Dividing by 10 or 100 the probabilities of occurrence will not make any difference to emotional attitudes. The key to the problem is of course the question of the accident's magnitude. The risk of a serious nuclear accident should be brought into proportion and considered on a human and environmental scale comparable to that of other industrial or natural hazards such as oil, coal, chemicals, volcanoes, etc. in order to lessen its emotional impact" (a mining engineer, member of an employer's organisation).

"We do not deny the hazards connected with the coke-works" (technical director, steel industry)

"The worst hitch is a sphere of gas that explodes... if it is toxic. In this case the only cure is prevention. Afterwards one can do all sorts of things to manage the accident, but what one should really do is prevent it." (technical director, industrial gas plant)

"Every Frenchman consumes an average 50 kilos of products from our group. Seen from this angle, this unquestionably gives responsibilities in the nutritional field. As far as acid rain is concerned we try to control small details, such as checking the combustion of our fleet of lorries." (General manager, food industry).

"We have done almost all we could with chemistry. We are now going to have to start genetic engineering, which is a major problem, because when we begin interfering with human genetics we will be launching into the unknown. This will entail a major environmental risk" (General manager, food industry)

"In chemistry and pharmacology there are real risks: liquid chlorine, a 10 cubic-metre tank of chlorine that explodes, phosgene. These are 900-kilo enclosed refrigerated containers. In pharmacology we use toxically active products, but in very small quantities and with

the greatest confining precautions. The raw material stage is the most hazardous." (Director of research, pharmaceutical industry)

"Any active product has side-effects, but almost every person reacts differently(...) However it is always difficult to evaluate the impact on the body of a continuous absorption of new substances) (...). An accident may occur, you can have an excess level of certain molecules that ought to disappear with the rain or with the plant's metabolism, but that ends up polluting a crop. Checking the batches is part of quality control" (same).

"The car is an instrument of freedom. But isn't there a risk that it might in the future constrain our freedom, physical, sociological, political or technological? It is up to us to measure the risks and reduce them, otherwise we might in a few years' time jeopardize our industry."<sup>18</sup>

"When planes are launched, they already comply with all the rules of airworthiness that I told you about. However, as the history of air travel shows, it happens sometimes that certain things had not been foreseen, such as, in the case of jets, structural fatigue. Alternate compression and decompression causes metal strain." (Technical director, aeronautical industry)

What is new in the acknowledgement of environmental risks, as in that of actual pollution, is that it now extends far beyond the production stage, down to the use cycle of the product by the consumer.

"Usually the action we take is not directed at the outside user of the product, because we tend to separate internal and external risks of accidents or poisoning. Inside, accidents are basically related to production. Outside, they are related to transportation (e.g. all those notorious flying bombs). Finally there are risks connected with the storage and use of the product by the client." (Director of communications, industrial gas plant)

Some risks may be more difficult to acknowledge because they are not altogether predictable, but are linked to a lack of scientific knowledge. This also now needs to be said, and leads to a positive philosophy of scientific uncertainty:

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<sup>18</sup> Raymond Levy, Address to the Motor Press Club, Frankfurt, September 12, 1989.



"We cannot affect innocence and say, : we don't know if our products are dangerous or pollute. We have our chemists, and you don't need to study for many years to know that chlorine is toxic. We know that hazardous products are released among the general public. But for some other lines of products we don't necessarily know all the facts. The industry is expected, understandably, to know as much as possible. But when we launch a new product on the market, we really have to comply with drastic requirements, experts' reports and other important documents. What happened with the CFC's was that we produced them because in the context of the chemistry of our domestic lives they were an inert, stable, non-flammable product. we knew they would pour out into the atmosphere, but retain their inert properties. So we were not afraid to take the plunge. Until the relatively recent findings of the studies carried out about Concorde," (Director of research, petro-chemical industry).

More generally, conversion to the environment or the 'road to Damascus' effect are experienced as the fulfilment of a great mission, as can be seen in the frequent use by the heads of industry of the crusade metaphor in their statements.

"The increase in energy consumption, which goes with that of consumption in general, threatens the thermic balance of our planet by virtue of the increased greenhouse effect. In ordinary acts of our everyday lives, and more importantly in our everyday professional activities, we must all behave as crusaders of ecological protection.

The future of our living environment is at stake, and above all that of future generations."<sup>19</sup>

Such cathartic statements not only signal a change of attitude towards environmental risks, they also serve to legitimate in the industrialists' own eyes his conversion to a new way of considering others. The following story is typical of a rhetoric that allows a transfer of identity, a reversal of behaviour hitherto considered righteous.

"I was the manager of a large factory along the Rhine, and the pressure from environmentalist groups was very strong. I was setting up a very dangerous cyanhydric acid unit. The greens came to see us and said "You can't do this". I arranged an open-door operation. First we said "Come and visit us, we'll explain what we are doing and show you the safety measures we are taking. We gave the environmentalists (teachers for the most part) a lecture. One of them said "What if your engineers made a mistake

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<sup>19</sup> B. Tramier. ELF-ERAP Environment Manager.

in their calculations?" This annoyed me: I repeated my explanation in simpler terms. Same question. I thought, "Easy! I'll bash him up": "You are a headmaster, if you don't teach your kids to make correct calculations, they will never become engineers." Now I realise in hindsight what a big service this person did me by asking this question. We do find it difficult to imagine a disaster. Technicians do tend to be certain about what they are doing. Fortunately so. But we must succeed in training engineers to think about industrial risks and organise group sessions to imagine all the disastrous scenarios possible within each unit in case of failure of equipment or drift of process." Security manager, chemical industry)

The ironic side of the story is that management recognises other interests among people living outside...but not among unionists, still considered as "a part of Myself".:

"Union people? we don't really see much difference. On the industrial side, it is only a question of skill and competence. We are all professionals: this is not a matter of union demand"...(the same).

#### **An inescapable ethical change**

This new-and partial-awareness has led some of the officials interviewed - the most advanced - to raise the problem of linking up various principles of civil commitment into a coherent philosophy, i.e. adopting an ethical code. One of our interviewees explained this very clearly: "What's the use of ethics in a company? Man defines himself by his ethics, and human conflicts are very often ethical ones. Don't you think companies ought to define their own ethics and determine their operating rules?" Mention is often made of a corporate culture. There is a code of ethics behind it which is not always formulated. So the recommendation we are increasingly making to company heads we meet is: 'Define your ethics, your scale of values, of reference, so that people will know.' Of course you can hardly imagine a University graduate applying for a post and enquiring: 'What are the ethics of your company?'. He may not get a very good reception. But I think we are moving in that direction. The way in which a company is going to define its ethics determines the way in which it is going to communicate with its staff and the public at large. And that is what is helping to restore the image of companies in the eyes of the citizen, the fact that firms now claim values to defend" This structuring of ethical principles is already giving rise to large numbers of public statements by individual companies, organisations, unions and various coalitions. They tend to take the form of codes or sets of recommendations gathered under stimulating titles such as 'responsible care' promoted by American industry. An intense activity is thus underway in national and above all international industrial circles, jointly elaborating

codes of conduct. One such example in the chemical field is CEFIC<sup>20</sup>, whose goal was explained to us by one of its leaders:

"We try to promote in the entire industry improvement agreements (what Americans and Canadians call 'responsible care'), according to which management accepts to sign a number of ethical principles later expanded into codes of conduct. The International Chemical Union is soon to sign one. The degree of enforcement of these codes is then assessed, but is of course difficult to quantify. The credibility rating of individual companies is thus determined. We try to develop a system of joint management of the agreements, with the governments and the environmentalists. In Europe a generalisation of the responsible care philosophy is still far away. German industry reacted most indignantly to the idea at first, English industry got off to a good start and the Italians seem to be looking at it very closely."

Clearly this industrial civility is still a precarious and as yet unconfirmed trend. It often tends to restrict itself to codes of ethics which formalize and harmonise professional practices rather than challenge their purpose or limit their hitherto undisputed prerogatives. It is likely that the agreements thus codified are all the more widely published although their enforcement cannot be seriously verified. It is also likely that they seek to anticipate the inescapable enforcement of laws which sooner or later will have to assign new boundaries to hitherto lawful industrial acts. Last, but not least, outside civility and ethics seem to have a paradoxical effect on the inside: these tend to amalgamate the variety of industrial contradictory actors, denying the constituency of separate union points of view.

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<sup>20</sup> CEFIC is the spokesman with the EEC of the chemical industry of Western Europe.

## Industrial civility is hard to achieve

Can one consider that environmental problems are taken seriously by industry? "Definitely yes", replied one official. These were the reasons he gave for being so convinced:

"The environment has become a component which, alongside technology, financial constraints and the management of human resources must be integrated into corporate strategies. Firstly, on account of the impact of manufacturing processes on air and water and waste levels, and secondly the fate of the products after use (there is increasing concern about packaging materials and after-use collection). The concept of 'eco-product' is progressing, and so is the idea of the 'environmentally sound' seal to be affixed to it. An entire industry of environmentally-related trades is also building up, including water, gas and waste processing sectors. French water companies such as Lyonnaise de Eaux and Generale de Eaux are exporting their know-how to countries as far as Hong Kong or South America. Management now understands that it is normal for companies to take their responsibilities within the community and for environmental concern to be shared by all citizens."

This assertion may well sound too optimistic. We found that changes in behaviour brought about by environmental concern, far from being taken for granted, are slow to catch on and are often experienced as a burden. They seem difficult to internalize in depth in the French cultural model shared by all the industry officials interviewed. As also demonstrated by other polls and surveys, our investigation shows that while a majority of company managers are predictably still rather reluctant to support the environmentalist ideal<sup>21</sup> this is also the case for the management of large corporations, although they are far more involved in the issue than most small or medium-sized firms. Of course, ostensibly defensive statements of the type: "The pollution we cause is inevitable and might even be a good thing" have almost disappeared. But the sheer amount of literature devoted by industry to the expression of resentment vis-a-vis other social actors points to the dominance among industrial officials of good conscience offended by undue criticism. This wounded identity shows through the surface of almost every sentence of all interviewees, even one who was planning an impressive set of measures

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<sup>21</sup> SOFRES-Le Figaro poll, 28/11/89, compared with a March, 1989 poll including the same questions put to the French population as a whole: 32% only of managers, against 41% of Frenchmen, considered environmental protection a priority. 72% of the population thought that the citizen is entirely or largely responsible for environmental problems (against 57% only of company heads), 73% of the French considered that investing in the environment was costly whereas 18% only thought that it always or often resulted in productivity gains. 52% requested tax relief for companies investing in environmental protection. Penalties and financial support for local government were, of course, approved of by only a small minority of interviewees.

for environmental protection and was conquering the Russian safety research market!

Finally, I believe that the fortunes of the next stage in the consideration by the managers of industry of environmental issues are dependent on the way in which they will solve the dilemma with which the power of propaganda of the modern media faces them. Either they will actively contribute to producing docile consumer-citizens incapable of saying "no" to a polluting product or avoiding a polluting use of the said product, or they will deliberately refrain from influencing public opinion and allow the building of responsible consumer behaviour. In the latter case, however, they will openly run the risk of facing negative reactions from their own employees, boycotts, the counter-power of environmentalists or consumerists, and having to adapt to sudden changes in ways of living. Industry cannot but move towards more open civility. To quote the Director of research of a chemical-pharmaceutical company, "I believe that the basic trend is towards more public-spirited firms. We all know with the case of steel, how the narcissistic designs of heavy industry came to an end. Industry is part of society, and we must be aware that we now have to negotiate our place in it, in the noblest sense."

PART 111.

UNION STRATEGIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT:

A low intensity problem.

1. Unions and workers perceptions during the seventies and eighties.

Each one of the "big three" Unions in France (CGT, CGT-FO, and CFDT) has formulated, since the early eighties, national structures dealing with environmental and consumer' problems (Allan-Michaud 1982, Duclos, 1984). Each of them has set up an "Environmental Commission", and each of them has promoted the creation (inside or outside the Union's structure) of a union-consumers' group, participating in the public "Institut National de la Consommation". But, beyond these-more or less empty-shells, we can state that actions undertaken by the French Unions in order to relate environmental questions to other workers' claims and protests, have been generally weak and infrequent. If prices (for the popular consumer) have been frequently questioned, struggles for banning a product, improving a site's environment, etc.. have been so rare that they can be easily pointed out.

In short (Duclos, 1984), the CFDT was active in the late seventies on nuclear problems, helping scientists to reveal significant faults in the French electricity-nuclear programme. The CGT has been active in questioning work related cancers in the steel industry. Both unions have supported local struggles for compensating workers suffering from asbestosis, or exposure to other toxic substances. The CGT (along with the Communist Party) has created a specific environmental movement (MNLE) which whilst not really substantial, somehow helped to raise the problem of illegal industrial or domestic waste disposal, noticeably in municipalities led by the Communist Party around Paris.

In the late eighties, these sporadic efforts decreased, in a more general context of unions' weakening: severe loss of constituency, crisis in the ideological frameworks, etc.. (Haeusler and Gros, 1990).

At the same time, the industrial world was completely changing, with the worst working conditions suffered by temporary workers, most of whom not being unionized, were not eager to announce to shop stewards small or even serious accidents. But even in a time when the CFDT was officially criticizing the "damages of progress", and was supporting environmentalist groups, it was difficult to find many examples of struggles which included environmental protection demands. On the contrary, most of the strikes focussed on improvements in working conditions, and disconnected inhouse from outside problems. A number of demonstrations were seemingly

opposed to environmental approaches which were, still considered as directly antagonistic to worker's interests. Alternative products never emerged as significant demands (Harff, 1981), even when the "quality of production" developed as a permanent part of Union programmes.

Compared with other European unions, the French movement has been severely struck by the economic and social crisis during the eighties (Beaudouin et al, 1983, Bibes and Mouriaux, 1990). Like in the United States, but for different reasons, the number of active union members, already low, decreased even more. No organisation was spared this desertion, which was particularly marked among young workers (Capdevielle et al, 1990). Mistrust of Union "bureaucrats" has developed as a widely shared feeling. New kinds of strikes have emerged (SNCF<sup>22</sup> Nurses in the public Hospital system, etc...), led by groups explicitly avoiding any obedience to official Unions. This trend appears to have slowed down a little during the two last years, due to the charisma of new and more aggressive leaders (like in Force Ouvriere), and to more tolerant behaviour among permanent militants. According to certain indications, a reversal in recruitment tendencies might be expected. One condition for it could be that unions would distance themselves from political allegiance. This seems to fit with new "anti-political establishment" tendencies among young workers, as well as young environmentalists (Boy and Allan Michaud, 1989, Capdevielle, Meynaud and Mouriaux, 1990).

Meanwhile, coming to the health and safety question, Union strategies have not formally changed since the mid-eighties when the former Minister of Work, Jean Auroux initiated a new pattern of industrial relations, including the right to debate qualitative aspects of work, and rights to alert workers to hazardous situations and substances. In fact, unions have become institutionalized parts of the control of production processes. We could even say that the most bureaucratized side of the safety job has been frequently devolved to Union representatives. At the same time, unions have been much more mobilized by management to participate in a renewal of operative processes, in the context of entirely new technologies (Domergue et al, 1984). At the national level, the constituency crisis has been so deeply experienced that environmental topics have receded from a fairly important position in union newspapers, to a very modest one, compared to themes such as unemployment, low skills, or wages. Besides, environment has never been seriously considered by the French unions as a resource for new employment, and has implicitly been seen as a threat of unemployment, until very recently. One can say that before 1989 (the "year of the Earth")

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<sup>22</sup> Societe Nationale des Chemins de Fer: French railways.

many union leaders at many levels still considered environmental issues as subordinate and potentially dangerous or ambiguous. Some of them really "discovered" its inescapable importance, at about the same time as the general public.

This is not to say that environmental issues for many years have been of no real concern for Unions in France. In dangerous industries, for example, Union publications undoubtedly fulfill an alarm function of. But this concern has not turned into further direct support for environmentalists, as was the case for CFTD during the seventies. As a matter of fact, it seems that the environment has become an open cultural item, allowing everybody to denounce pollution and nuisances, in a tone which is not very different from the tone used in managerial literature. At the same time, it is much less probable to find in union literature, any statements criticizing products (car, etc.) or proposing alternative improvement or choice, than some years ago. As if the new positions of management somehow helped the unions not to take strong positions in these matters.

## 2. The CGT and the environment.<sup>23</sup>

The CGT has long resisted recognising the environment as a simple fact. The biggest French trade-union has long preferred to use the strange expression "cadre de vie" (literally 'framework of life') In fact, it is very clear that this term was used to tie up the environment with a number of other things such as: "needs for housing, safety, health, culture, transportation, or leisure"<sup>24</sup> In the road-making and construction sectors, the term "cadre de vie" was used to speak of "amenities", and "facilities" as parts of the same "human needs", ignoring their impact on the natural richness of the country. Lately, environment has been discovered, provided "Man is put in the centre of it, along with the satisfaction of his needs"<sup>25</sup>. More practically, ecological terms such as "physical milieu" have been used more and more frequently, mainly hinting at the cleanliness of the industrial site. But the environment (which was, for a time, used in the managerial sense of "social environment") was in the middle of the eighties still subject to a "desperate" attempt by the CGT to change or restrain its meaning. For example, the notion of "industrial environment" was raised by the CGT secretary,

<sup>23</sup> "Analyses et documents économiques, n°39: Dossier "questions d'environnement et action syndicale". Special-Options, n° 30: "ou va la terre". RCE n°21: "comment les CE saisissent du cadre de vie?". RCE special n°38: "aujourd'hui, de quelle intervention syndicale avons-nous besoin pour l'activité économique?". RCE n°46 (Septembre 1990) "Realités de la gestion écologique"

<sup>24</sup> RC n°21, proposition du 41 eme congrès de la CGT.

<sup>25</sup> RCE n°46 op cit, p22



L. Brovelli, for denying the specificity of outside environment. The "industrial environment" was proposed as a key word, permitting union activists to "retarget" environmental issues as if they were "enlarged occupational health issues"<sup>26</sup>. This was especially the case for campaigns on noise at work, or environmental cancer.

Nevertheless, in 1988, the CGT slowly moved forward: the environment was at last acknowledged as a specific problem. But, as usual, this formal acknowledgement was accompanied by many restrictive considerations, and the main solutions were still phrased in term of institutional control. The 'workers' information and participation' theme came in a timid voice. For example, L. Brovelli asked for "a more important place for workers in the institutions which have to know environment questions, as the Agencies de bassin"<sup>27</sup> She wished for an "obligation" to consult the workers on the whole set of questions concerning the prevention of pollution and risks, in the "Installations classes". But, at the same time, the DRIR Inspecteurs should be much more numerous (she proposed the doubling of their number).

When environmental concern has resisted new constructions, the CGT approach has unequivocally been on the side of industrial production. Thus, the CGT has called (in opposition to most of the environmental movements) support for the construction of dams on the River Loire<sup>28</sup> or near Chambonchard (Montlucon Bassin), and has supported the maintenance of the Hydro-Electric plant of Saint Chamas (on the Durance). Preservation of water supplies was the argument in favour of these positions.

The CGT "consumers organisation" (INDECOSA-CGT) has always favoured economic growth, and the increase of popular means of consumption. This organisation never departed from a very simple line: there are no false needs, and the betterment of production means first a betterment in the quality of the products<sup>29</sup>, which, in turn, appeals to more technical research. This "productivist" position never changed in 15 years, even if recent texts were calling for "clean technologies"<sup>30</sup>

The CGT is also officially a member of the MNLE (Mouvement national de lutte pour l'environnement) which was created in 1981, by communist activists, who shared the same "productivist values", but who developed an

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<sup>26</sup>Lydia Brovelli, secretaire de la CGT, "Environment Industriel", 19-6-1984. Conference de Presse.

<sup>27</sup>(conference de Presse du 22 Juin 1988, par Lydia Brovelli, p.2

<sup>28</sup>Declaration des Regions CGT, "Le Peuple", n°1310 (17 Mai 1990)

<sup>29</sup>See CGT Journal "le Peuple, and RCE, de 1986 a 1990: articles of G.Poupon, B.Mathe, M.Hulot, M.Madieu, Jean Moulin, et al.

<sup>30</sup>see Duclos D. L'Action syndicale-consumeriste: ses paradoxes et ses perspectives, approche sociologique. (convention 83.D 0229) CSU/CNRS, Paris. 1984.

acute sensitivity to domestic waste issues (due to the hard job their deputies, mayors and town councillors must carry, in very polluted urban areas).

In most cases, when environmental issues are directly addressed by CGT activists at the branch or local levels, it can be explained by some kind of related interest, in terms of economic growth or industrial production. For example, in 1990, severe droughts in France were pointed out by water industry trades unions, as strong incentives for improving water quality by the way of new techniques<sup>31</sup>. De-polluting, rather than no pollution...As F. Combrouze, member of the CGT "Cadre de vie" sector put it: "the answer is in the obstinate struggle for demanding investment in purification systems"<sup>32</sup>. Demands for a "better economic and ecologic efficiency" must go along the same path. The maintenance of skilled positions and the development of investment (aimed at reducing the quality and charge of pollutants in waters) are supposed to act in concert. On the contrary, precarious jobs, low wages, disappearance of collective guarantees, are just as likely to be presented as the main consequences of this type of involvement.

Many examples of this "weltanschauung" can be displayed:

Thus, the risk issue has been raised by the CGT Railway workers, arguing that the transportation of hazardous substances by road was much more perilous than by train. It was an argument for keeping open many tracks and stations (thus, preserving employment and skills), which were to be closed down by a management who tended to prefer a few TGV lines, than many other traditional facilities.

Facing acid rains, the CGT has favoured a "catalytic converter" solution, arguing that our country had good public and private companies capable of producing such a facility with reduced costs<sup>33</sup>. More broadly, the CGT has

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<sup>31</sup>We must recall that the Water industries in France are among the biggest and most monopolized businesses. 40% of the water market is occupied by the Generale des Eaux group, which is composed with 1600 companies. (430 companies in Foreign countries) counting 17,000 employees, and representing in 1990, a turnover of FF.116,000,000,000, and a net benefit of FF 2.2,000,000.

<sup>32</sup>RCE n°46 op cit p.22

<sup>33</sup>Declaration commune et conference de presse de Federatisons CGT des industries chimiques, Federation CGT des travailleurs de la metallurgie, de la CGT des secteurs cadre de vie, et du secteur economie et de l'Indecosa CGT (RCE n°21, Mars 1985)

developed an official position favouring the "clean car": severe standards would be supported in terms of speed limitation, catalytic converters on large and small cars, lead free gasoline, etc. The "dependency" of the French industry (for catalytic converters production) was criticized and the head of Peugeot, J. Calvert (who put forward a new "clean engine" in opposition to the catalytic converter) was blamed for utopian views and resisting quick and necessary improvements. But, of course, all those positions were undertaken from the premises that the "Car is a social need"<sup>34</sup> and that "the car industry is the backbone of our economy".

On the industrial waste disposal problem, the CGT has often supported local struggles against ground or underground disposal, and has favoured industrial solutions such as burning, and recycling. In addition the CGT claims to forbid waste imports from foreign countries. The waste problem has emerged as one of the few items on which the CGT called for cooperation with other actors such as Industrialists (GECOM, etc) and municipalities.

With regard to the big forest fires, the CGT demanded more men in public forestry (ONF) and in fire departments: (in permanent positions rather than in precarious jobs). The CGT also sought acknowledgement of the "ecological function" and the "industrial function" of the French forests<sup>35</sup>. Incidentally, The CGT promoted the replacement of old Fokker and Canadair water "bombers", by a "new French adapted" Transall.

In some circumstances, internal bargaining has been developed, in order to stop or to modify an industrial project which was considered problematic in terms of environmental protection. This was the case of an EDF (Electricite de France) project proposing an artificial bed for the River Romanche, which happened to destroy the natural course of the river richly endowed with trout. At the end of a long discussion process, the project was finally accepted, under certain "rhetoric conditions". Far from being a real alternative the democratic inter-union process was just utilized as a means for the EDF to pass its project without any real opposition in the regional working milieu. The CGT "cadre de vie" mediation, was used, as a "Trojan horse" (helping the industrialist's side to win).

<sup>34</sup>CGT, Service de Presse, declaration de la CGT sur la voiture propre et l'essence sans plomb, 25 Juillet 1989.

<sup>35</sup>Collectif National Foret-filiere bois CGT "Les forets, premiere richesse national", 10 Avril 1990.

Another recent example was the resistance of the CGT to the projected new highway in Le Havre (barreau de raccordement A 29), not because of its ecological impact...but because it might endanger the industrial zone.

When I interviewed some Union representatives responsible for environmental issues, they complained that the "real CGT's positions were not understood by the public". But looking at the types of positions displayed, it is not surprising. Let us say that it is only since 1990, that the CGT has initiated moves in the direction of stronger positions on the environment, in terms of relatively independent assumptions, distinct from the heavy ideologically encapsulated "productivist" position. For example, The Centre Confederal d'Etudes Economiques et Sociales state <sup>36</sup> that the good results of air pollution control in France were fragile, and not significant because they were mainly the results of nuclear-electric energy production, and not of desulfurization techniques. The CGT analyst also considered the very bad effects of the growth of the road transportation. But, he finally stated that the "struggle against airborne pollution must operate as an industrializing force", which means in fact no to "carbon tax", and "yes" to a strategic development of nuclear energy; A 100 Gigawatt programme was therefore proposed for Northern Europe as a means of achieving a 27% decrease of CO2 growth.

The position of the CGT concerning the management of water in France was strongly articulated. In the note economique n33: (juin 1990) it was recalled that with a double water resource per capita compared with Germany or England (4000m3, England: 2200 M3, Germany 2600 mf.) The French depollution ratio is half (35%) of the German effort (70%).

This was considered by the CGT analyst as scandalous. He pointed out that the French 'savoir faire' in the matter was very high, and utilised in foreign countries by French water supply companies. Here, the CGT analyst criticised the intensive agriculture policy pushed by the EEC, and the water consuming maize politics (70% of the irrigated lands).

In the CGT journal addressed to executives, ('Options'), a special issue was recently dedicated to the global environment (No 30: "Ou va la terre?"). For the first time, real and deep questions were raised by the union journalists who interviewed Mrs Gro Brundtland, some environmentalists and some prominent scientists, without any restrictive pre-judgements.

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<sup>36</sup>(in its note n<sup>o</sup>307, September 1990)

### The CGT at plant level

Regarding the role of plant joint committees (CHSCT) the CGT has demanded the following:

- The C.E (comite d'entreprise, the CHSCT being a specialised part of it) must be consulted about taxes on water and sanitary dues by industry to the "Agences financiers de Bassin. The C.E must be informed on the utilisation of those funds by the AFB. The C.E must have official access to data on type, quality and control of waste disposal in the environment. The C.E must be informed of the threshold values which have been authorised, and on the performance by the management with regard to these values.
- The unions must have the right to inform simultaneously the workers and the population who have common interests in the field of safety and health.
- The unions must cooperate: local unions must facilitate transfers of information from sewer systems workers' unions to industrial sectors.
- They must emphasise the democratic procedures which were necessary to harmonize divergent opinions among unionists, above all at plant level.

### 3. The CFDT and the environment<sup>37</sup>

In the CFDT, one tends to think of one's fellow activists as "actual or potential" members of the environmentalist movement in France, distinguishing them from "politicians who have freshly painted themselves green".

Indeed, there "has been" a living tradition on environmental sensitivity in the CFDT, even if some "backlash" has accompanied the changing socialist politics in the mid-eighties, banning all radical discourses, and adopting a much lower profile on those topics. A Working group on the environment (which was previously named "commission on environment" has existed for several years in the CFDT at the national level. Thus far focused on industrial impacts, the working group's activity has recently been re-enlarged including various items such as: "natural space, urbanisation, technological innovation, economic instruments, a global policy on environment."

<sup>37</sup> Our information on recent positions is mainly based in documents included in the internal confederal journal "CFDT-Vie en societe". La villette, 75955 Paris cedex 19

The CFDT has developed international relations on that topic, notably with the DGB, (a common session was organised by both unions in march 1990, analysing the Unions environmental politics). Some relationships have also been set up with Italian unions. The CFDT is represented at two committees Energy and Environment in the CES.

More rapidly than the CGT (where most environmental opinions have been frozen for a long time in a productivist defence and fossilised corporative discourses). The CFDT drawing from its own militant past, has distinguished the environment from specific risk issues related to industrial sites. Global issues are seen as at least as important as local ones, and must be addressed in global terms by the Union movement. The CFDT evidently feels it must express positions on every ecosystemic threats, independently from corporate industrial considerations. This union goes on analysing our global way of development and its consequences, like the amount of consumed energy, airborne pollution, and also chronic traffic jams, urban spaces congestion, etc. It was stated that our model of development cannot be directly extended to third world countries, and admitted that we cannot wait for "*scientific certainties*" before coming to political decisions in these matters.

The 'turning green' of the industrialists, was nevertheless, analysed with a touch of scepticism: indeed, industrial ecologism may be used as a protective weapon against foreign industries, which were seen to be open to criticism, as well as the "eco-publicity" which was not based (as in the Phosphates versus non phosphates washing powders) on a real question: all kinds of washing powders are polluting the rivers, with or without phosphates!

The CFDT acknowledged the fact that German Industrialists had, first among Europeans, (and probably pushed by a strong environmental movement) understood that the environment is an opportunity for the economy. The CFDT supports the DGB's proposal to help equip small cars with catalytic converters. The CFDT shares with the author the view that French industry still considers the environmental issue as a regulatory constraint, or as an heroic effort, much more than a positive and profitable incentive. The CFDT criticized both the 'French Managers' culture' and the industrial Strategy: both factors were seen to restrain industrialists from accepting the environment as a part of normal economic activity.

Regarding general institutions, the CFDT plainly had more ambitious proposals than the CGT. But, it also came with a certain ambiguity in its position, related to the politics of the Socialist Party and those of the Ministry of Environment, held by Brice Lalonde. For example, the CFDT supported the "*technocratic*" project of reunifying several environmental agencies (like ANRED, AFME, AQA, AFB), without any criticism of the fact that one

practical output of this merging would be to create a position of power for some Ingenieurs des Mines, and some Finance managers.

- The CFDT argued the need for the extension of the principle of "the Polluter Pays" to "other categories" that is to say farmers (who were found to be big water polluters), and at the same time the adaptation of the level of taxes according to the polluters individual liability, and solvability.

- Whereas the CGT said nothing about ecological labeling for products, the CFDT agenda included the setting up of a "Green Label" which would involve a standard taking in to account the whole manufacturing process of the product: including material and energy saving. The CFDT supported the European Green Label project, that will be attributed to products which respect the environment from "cradle to grave". The 'Jury' for this project will comprised of members nominated by the government, by corporations, unions and movements representatives, who will establish their judgement on the basis of European standardised technical documentation.

The CFDT assumed that ecology is employment inducing: reducing pollution, healing the forests, sustaining natural resources (for agriculture, leisure and tourism), all those desirable objectives are likely to create specific and durable employment. The new needs of developed and developing countries in terms of clean technologies will support a continuous enlargement of a "Green Market". Under present conditions, the CFDT noted that 30% of products and processes were disappearing, due to bad environmental impact.

The CFDT took notice of global threats, about which the CGT for example had no clear position, and therefore admitted the necessity of reducing CO2 emissions, It assumed that the very rapid growth of road transportation had been responsible for half of the problem. The CFDT took a position against the international management of hazardous waste, which seem to transfer the problem to developing countries, as a way of reducing the burden of their debt. A strong international legal framework was seen as the only solution to stop this disastrous trend.

Yet, The CFDT argued against the "environmental dictatorship" which could emerge from a dramatic emphasise on ecological catastrophes, if in the meantime, the democratic framework of our political systems had been left out of the consideration.

Finally, the CFDT supported the governmental "Plan National pour l'Environnement" (June 1990) which severely criticised the environmental politics of the last twenty years, which were unable to stop the continuous degradation of natural spaces and milieux. The CDDT supported the Eight Principles of Action of the PNE.

**The CFDT at site level.**

The CFDT has also asked for an "extension of the missions of the CHSCT to environmental issues". The CFDT stated that every specialist shared this point of view and even the State Inspectors (DRIR) supported their demands on the matter. The main question raised was whether the environment, sooner or later would be internalized in the economic results of industry. The CFDT also claimed that an "Ecological assessment" created by plant managers should be debated by social actors. This assessment was supposed to become the main instrument for a CHSCT in the future, notably in helping representatives to have some control over standard procedures; and to propose preventive strategies.



## CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES.

Something like an environmental "chorus" now seems to be at work in France. Everybody claims to be an environmentalist: managers, administrators, unions, Workers, Citizen. New political perspectives (vote expectations) have somehow "boosted" new legal and administrative decisions. Drastic changes have been introduced with the Governmental PNE, and many instructions are now passing through the legal machinery. The new European context is certainly helping to adjust a number of national peculiarities, and voices from other countries are now more easily heard than before.

Of course, this phenomenon is ambiguous: managers and administrators plead for purely technical and regulatory specific improvements, which could take place in the existing framework of industrial and social relations. Unions go along the same paths, with some stress on health at work, but press for reform in a rather passive way. Their internal difficulties have had some impact in terms of money, intellectual fitness, capacity for quick reactions and ambitious proposals. For example, the CFDT has certainly been more "influenced" by the DGB in these matters, than the converse, despite its own "environmentalist" past. Workers, on their side, still avoid any direct and organised expression of sympathy towards environmentalism, and seem to be tantalized by authoritarian and even xenophobic messages. Citizens, when asked, declare they are still not ready to change their habits in consumption or transportation, even when politicians begin to criticise the car "overkilling" urban centres.

The main point is elsewhere: it lies perhaps in the fact that young people (urban as well as rural) are more and more relating to anti-establishment and pro-environmental positions, this political profile being like that of environmentalists themselves. The continuous growth of environmentalist vote expectations in polls, despite the repeated attempts to depreciate the "Green" political parties is a significant clue to some important change in the popular culture in France. We are, perhaps, witnessing the foundation of a new social identity based - at work as in civilian life - on strong mistrust of unilateral technocratic solutions. Certainly workers as well as environmentalists have long understood that those solutions have usually generated more problems (unemployment, massive destruction of resources), than they can solve. The whole question is to know whether or not the social partners will be capable of taking charge of these new positions, which are, at the moment more implicit than fully developed. Industrialists, are still reluctant to consider the environment both as a necessary path for growth, or as a matter of democratic interaction with consumers, citizen and workers. The Unions, because they have so frequently been reduced in France to

cooperative sects, seemingly fixated by their narrow status interests are similarly open to question. The main risk is that young people, being frequently excluded from permanent employment, will simply not become members of the unions. In that case, would the new unions' environmental rights proposed by the unions (notably the CHSCT extended services) be of any use.. if the French Unions simply disappear from many places in economic life?

In any case, a more open framework in industrial relations may allow workers - whether they belong to traditional trade unions or not - to enrich a global environment management with their knowledge, experience, aspirations and opinions.

## APPENDIX

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