

Levers and Effects of Socioeconomic Transformations on the Quebec Union Actor

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Abstract: Beyond the conflict bitter at the end for workers, what is the health of the Quebec labour movement? The purpose of this article is to highlight the major trends sweeping the world of work and employment, and to identify their effects on the union actor. Following this, we adopt a prescriptive approach, primarily based on the writings of Levesque and Murray (2003) to demonstrate that unions are not entirely unprepared for this new situation.

Keywords: conflict; trade union; labour; employment; new deal.

JEL Classification: R10; R11

1. Introduction

Once upon a time... a Union in Montmagny

March 2002. The workers of the factory Inglis Montmagny learn with dismay that the multinational Whirlpool intends to close the factory in March 2004 ranges. To a small town like Montmagny, the loss of 500 jobs will have serious consequences. However, the Montmagny plant is at the cutting edge of technology and, moreover, is profitable. According to the regional coordinator of the Central Democratic Union (CDU), Mark Lee, the Whirlpool decision is purely protectionist, just like American philosophy. To increase the profitability of its two factories based in the United States, Whirlpool decided to repatriate the Canadian production and redistribute its two U.S. plants. And there is nothing more to add to this decision (interview conducted by our team February 22, 2005). Besides the shock and before the closing time of the plant in two years, Inglis employees won't struggle with the company. The energies of the two parties will be further concentrated to prepare staff to face closure and to find a potential investor who could buy the factory and recreate lost jobs. To do this, a committee is established, exploration and several city agencies involved. When negotiating the renewal of the last collective agreement in August 2002, concrete actions are planned to help workers prepare to face the loss of their jobs. Thus, training projects are defined and approved by the employer and the union to ensure that they adequately meet the needs of the employees.

The article first explains how globalization and the changes in the organization of production are major trends affecting the world of work and employment. Then, we analyze

the effects of these changes on the union actor, particularly in terms of membership and bargaining power, based on the literature, statistical data, but also very real situations. Finally, autonomous levers on the one hand, and heteronomous other hand, that can enhance the influence of trade unionism, will be identified. To this end, we paid particular attention to two major unions in Quebec, namely the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN) and the Quebec workers Federation (FTQ).

2. Changes Affecting the World of Work and Employment

Meanwhile, they now have to long-term training leave to upgrade their knowledge in their field or, again, to explore a new one. Unpaid leave short and long term are also permitted. Within this same convention, are expected salary increases, the introduction of performance incentives for employees to receive additional income, the severance pay based on seniority as well as subsidized by the employer's contribution to group insurance. This demonstrates the willingness of the employer to be ethical in their decision making. Moreover, employees accept the employer's offer in a proportion of 90.5%. The climate is collaboration, not conflict. Until March 2004, continuing efforts have been put in place to find a potential investor. However, Whirlpool retains a right of scrutiny. The Chinese manufacture Haer is particularly interested in buying the plant in Montmagny, Whirlpool puts an end to discussions, however, since the purchaser is a competitor that manufactures similar products. Whirlpool will act the same way with any prospective buyer who is a competitor. On May 17, 2004, the CSD organizes a demonstration through the city of Montmagny under the theme "Reinventing Our Future Together" to honour the workers of the Inglis factory, but also to promote public awareness of the urgency to act to protect jobs in the region. Currently, the plant has found no potential buyer and the assets were liquidated at a discount in an auction. There remains only from the presence of Whirlpool at Montmagny a building, built in 1897 by Amable Belanger, founder of "Belanger stoves", on which was plastered a poster "for sale".

One may not understand the evolution of trade unionism without first understanding the importance of changes in its environment. In recent decades, the term "globalization" that is at the forefront of the talk of those who attempt to explain the socioeconomic and political transformations. *"The widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual"* (Held et al. 1999: 2). This definition goes beyond the purely economic and financial idea seems better incorporate the reality it tends to describe. Globalization is there based on three elements. The first, material, comes from the acceleration of the movement of goods, services, capital and people between countries. The second, space-time, is about the relationship between time and space, the relations amended by the explosion of new information and communications technologies (ICT). Finally, the impact of the two aspects disrupts the order and stability of society, affecting, for example, culture and identities of peoples. In light of these developments, it seems necessary to adapt to our business the institutional framework in which they occur.

Should be more emphasized the role played by new technologies in these transformations. Chaykowski and Giles claim that *"l'un des facteurs les plus importants facilitant le processus par lequel les activités économiques et sociales des pays sont devenus de plus en*

plus liées est l'avancement technologique" (Chaykowski and Giles, 1998: 3). And for Plihon, *"les nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la communication (NTIC) constituent l'une de ces vagues technologiques fondamentales qui ponctuent l'histoire du capitalisme et que les historiens qualifient de révolutions industrielles"* (Plihon, 2003: 6) giving wings to the capital and facilitated the liberalization and globalization of cultures and markets. Moreover, globalization calls for a redefinition of the role of the state and its interventions in a context of increased competition as nations, anxious to maintain their well-being and standard of living, want to attract and retain investments perceived as a source of wealth. However, this trend runs the risk of a dangerous erosion of the welfare state and human rights. To use the terminology of Thevenot, the commercial logic is the register used to define the *meaning of fair* (Thevenot, 1997: 93). Similarly, Powell argues that *"fickle international financial markets have become the judge and jury of policymaking"* (Powell, 2001:45). In this new context, it is not uncommon for the State to adopt an entrepreneurial narrative built around the central notion of "competitiveness" as a tool of analysis and reflection on the world and its evolution.

In this vein, especially Western countries, and the rest of the world, to some extent followed the lead of the neo-liberal economic theories in the 1980s. The goal is to foster the development of financial capitalism and curb the explosion of spending and budget deficits inherited from the politics of "*Welfare State*" as was done in earlier decades. The deregulation of markets (goods, services and capital), privatization, balanced budgets, tight control of inflation and reducing taxes on companies formed the five-point plan to restore national economic prosperity. Therefore, the priority of the state is that companies may be able to minimize production costs to maximize return to investors. Finally, Levesque and Murray for their part argue that globalization is a multidimensional process, incomplete and contradictory, which also leads to *"changements dans les modes d'organisation de la production des biens et des services, bouleverse les pratiques, les coutumes et les modes de fonctionnement des acteurs"* (Levesque and Murray, 2003, pp. 4-5). What is important about the Levesque and Murray is that this new context has profound implications for trade unionism. The three traditional players in the industrial relations system namely the State, businesses and unions, will revise *"leurs modes d'action"* and *"renégocier le cadre dans lequel se développent leurs échanges"* (Levesque and Murray, 2003, p. 5). In their view, globalization is having significant effects on the union actor, although they admit that the unions are not entirely without resources. But we shall return later to the question of possible levers of union power.

Moreover, the liberalization of trade and the greed of shareholders, we recall, are forcing organizations to become more productive and competitive. But also, we find that consumers demand more personalized products, more reliable and better quality, and the customer service is, for example, a key to stay ahead of competitors. Here goes that these changes pose challenges to businesses so that the Fordist model with its rigid and bureaucratic organizations producing standardized goods are no longer able to successfully cope. This being, innovation and flexibility have become the watchwords of the new models. As Castells today: productivity is primarily based on innovation, competitiveness and flexibility. Firms, regions, countries, economic units of all sizes ensure that their relations of production can get more innovation and more flexibility as possible (1999: 404). The search for flexibility in production will affect the organization of work, and will be implemented by two types of resources.

The first way is quantitative. They are designed to regulate the amount of work required in the production by the use of external market (e.g. temporary or peripheral workers) or modify the number of hours worked by staff of the organization (e.g. working hours change). In an unstable and changing environment, business leaders no longer believe in lifetime employment. In the short term, the work (as opposed to capital) is the prime factor of production to adjust to fluctuations in demand, so that job insecurity is growing. The second is qualitative. The privileged ways are versatility, delegation of responsibility and teamwork, which signify a rupture with the separation between conception and execution, and hyper-rigid classifications and detailed positions of the Fordist era. Companies are thinking of involving more employees in fulfilling their objectives and assigning them more responsibility and autonomy. According to some sociologists, the model of the *subject contractor* becomes predominant. The control of the company to ensure the productivity, competitiveness and innovation no longer goes through the discipline and direct threat to force obedience. Subtly, it teaches and directs the individual to forge an alliance between his personal aspirations and management needs. For example, the labour world has been reconceptualized to link the productivity, quality and innovation with commitment and performance of employees. It is thus binding upon need, desire for self-realization of a worker to company goals. Thus organizations get more from their employees, not by streamlining management to maximize efficiency but by fostering autonomy and creativity while canalizing them in the pursuit of excellence and success in the firm. This expertise, in turn, plays an intermediary role between the objectives that are economically desirable and those that appeal to people, teaching the art of self-realization which will develop the individual both as an individual and as a worker (Rose, 1998). Belanger et al., in an effort to generalize, have identified two major trends in the application of basic principles of the new production models: the first highlights the potential of high performance labour systems based on commitment. The focus is then on the enhancement of skills, high wages and commitment (...)

In contrast, lean organizations are seeking to become competitive by reducing labour costs, increasing digital flexibility and radically abandoning traditional employment relationships security (Belanger et al. 2004: 50). For their part, and Gunderson Chaykowsky note the existence of a "core-periphery" model, usually implemented by large multinationals, which integrates these two streams into one productive network. In this model, the firm retains a "nuclear" workforce composed of full-time workers, which are offered training opportunities and job security increase, but, in addition, the organization has a set of numbers in the "periphery", more in a precarious situation than the first, to make adjustments on the labour required by fluctuations in product demand (Chaykowsky et al., 2001, p. 38). This new reality leads Heckscher to argue that workers must learn to live with the flexibility, since it will persist and even spread further. (2001, p. 64). Furthermore, it is unclear how to harmonize the new models with traditional unions, in which skilled and full time workers hired by means of permanent contracts have prevailed during the Fordist period. It is obvious that instruments in the service of managerial flexibility, such as flexibility and the consideration of the merits or individual skills for promotions and determining salaries, are contradictory, respectively, with the detailed identification of positions and tasks as well as the standardization of working conditions advocated by unions, where seniority and hierarchy, determined by the first, are the eligible only criteria to make distinctions among employees.

3. The Effects of Transformations on the Union Actor

3.1 On the Composition of Trade Unions

It has been a weakening labour in several Western countries, and the figures confirm this. In Europe between 1993 and 2003, most countries experienced a substantial loss of union membership, notably Austria (-12.9%), Germany (23.9%), Greece (-11, 4%), Sweden (-12.6%), and the United Kingdom (-12%) (EIRO, 2004). Australia, meanwhile, has also experienced a significant decline in union coverage: from 45% to less than 25% (Levesque and Murray, 2003: 14). In the United States, union membership fell from 23.2% to 15.7% between 1980 and 2003 (LRA, 2004). In Canada, the rate of unionization, however, remained fairly stable for over 50 years, especially when compared to other Western countries. But it still decreased from 34.8% to 30.4% between 1990 and 2004 (Henry, 2004: 43), as can be observed in the graph below.

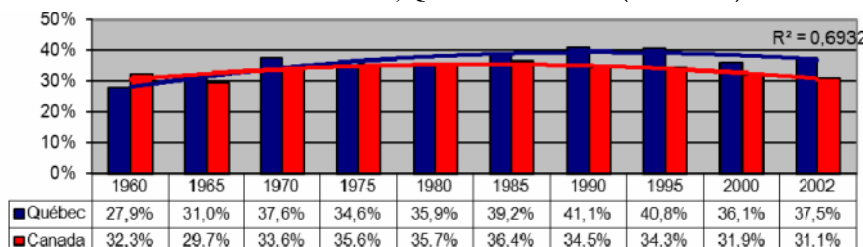
Canada's unionization rate (% of population of all non-farm payroll)

Years	Unionization rate
1951	28,4 %
1970	33,6 %
1990	34,5 %
2004*	30,4 %

Source: *Henry, 2004 and RHDCC, 2001.

Also, note that the rate of unionization in the public sector in Canada is much stronger (72.8%) than the private sector (17.8%) (CAW, 2004). Given the pressures exerted by government on trade unions in the state sector through deregulation, privatization and outsourcing, there are good reasons to be sceptical about the future of Canadian unionism (Murray, 2001, p. 245). However, the graphics on the unionization of Quebec have shown that unionism is there in a better situation. However, the polynomial trend line shows that the rate of unionization in Quebec has been decreasing since 1995.

Unionization rate's evolution, Quebec and Canada (1960-2002)



Source: Ministry of Labour, "La présence syndicale au Québec en 2003", Alexis Labrosse, 2004, p. 3

According Chaykowsky and Gunderson, the decline in union membership is due to a combination of factors, among which we mention the effects of international competition and internationalization of production, the increasing capital mobility, changes pejorative in

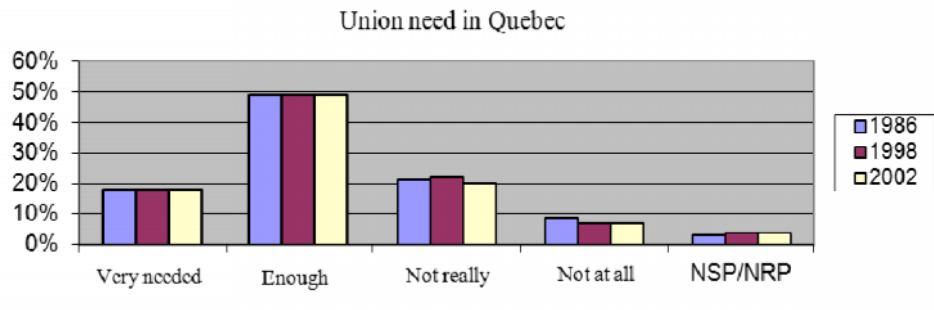
social legislation and the transformation of the composition of the economy due to the expansion of services and the decline of manufacturing. They add: the industrial restructuring in developed countries away from primary and manufacturing industries toward high- and low-end services has meant a relative employment shift away from areas of traditional union strength to areas where unions have had fewer members and, in the case of some industries (...) employees have been more difficult to organize (2001:42-43). These same authors find that the membership difficulties also stem from of the growing number of small businesses and non-standard employment that new production models created.

The Chrysotilde LAB case

February 2004. Chrysotilde Lab leaders offer office staff, miners and Bell LAKE (Lake Asbestos of Canada), a restructuring and development plan. This plan could be achieved only by the reopening of three collective agreements (USW) of these groups of workers that expire in autumn 2005 and 2006 to recover 25% in wages. The company cites losses of \$ 57 million over the last 5 years, including 9.8 million in 2004, production costs the highest in the world and increased international competition with China, Russia and Brazil. And as if that was not enough, the Quebec Liberal government saved from bankruptcy of its main competitor in Quebec, Jefferey Asbestos Mine, after the Caisse de depot et placement du Quebec has signed an agreement with him. As pointed out Mr. Normand Boutet, Assistant to the Chair in Chrysotilde Lab: "On finance de notre poche un compétiteur qui a reçu un beau cadeau de 80\$ millions de dollars du gouvernement du Québec et ainsi vu sa dette effacée en entier" (Le Soleil, 2005). Faced with this reality, the employees of the Bell mine, the LAKE mine, and office workers have had to make important decisions. International competition, the bias of the Government of Quebec on this issue (before the difficulties of this business, why not help the whole mining industry?), the desire to save the jobs caused employees to have little breathing space. The Bell mine workers agreed to 86% to open their collective agreements, those of LAKE mine have also agreed in a vote by show of hands and office staff has also accepted this proposal to 76%. Asked by the newspaper Le Soleil, Mario Ouellet, worker at the LAKE mine said: "Dans les circonstances, nous n'avions pas le choix d'accepter ! Nous écopons, car nous avons été traités injustement par le gouvernement du Québec, qui a maintenu en vie artificiellement notre compétiteur, la mine Jeffrey d'Asbestos, pour lui permettre maintenant d'effacer ses dettes et de repartir à zéro"(Le Soleil, 2005). By agreeing to reopen their respective collective agreements, the restructuring and development plan offered by the company may eventually allow the mining company to work for 6 years LAKE and Bell mines alternating or operating the first in winter and the second in summer. The company hopes that this delay may allow the international market of asbestos to recover. Currently, the LAKE mine is closed since November 2004 and no date had been specified to recall workers.

Also, more individualistic attitudes of workers, particularly the most skilled, lessen their degree of involvement in the process of social demands, framed by the unions. Levesque and Murray state that "en raison des changements importants des circonstances sociales et matérielles, la génération du nous a été remplacée par la génération du moi" (Levesque & Murray, 2003, p. 6). Similarly, Groux stated that: One of the causes of union crisis stems from the conflict between cultural issues that arise in universal terms and are shaped by the legacy of symbolic representations from the past, and the step by step defense of interests

singular because increasingly compartmentalised by technological and economic change (Groux, 1998, p. 28). The figures show however that the thrust of individualistic trends in Quebec society doesn't question the existence of unions, since over two thirds of the population feel they are needed.



Source: CROP Inc. (Claude Gauthier and Jean Martin), *Survey of Quebecers on their perception of unions, the FTQ Solidarity Fund and the workers of Quebec*, Montreal, July 1986, p. 31; CROP poll for the FTQ, June 1998, p. 25; Leger and Leger for the Solidarity Fund, July 2002, p. 5.

In short, in terms of their composition, the unions in Quebec don't seem to have been as severely affected as one may have expected. But what about their ability to negotiate terms of employment and work meeting the expectations of their affiliates? On its bargaining power. The popular belief among theorists, remember, is that contemporary globalization weakens union power. To quote Groux: "*L'avenir des syndicats reste incertain et le syndicalisme se conjugue mieux au présent qu'au futur*" (Groux, 1998: 18). It seems that building a successful and competitive economy in an era of globalization, doesn't accommodate what appears to some as an impediment to the desired progress.

A historical explanation for the decline of unionism is the putative link between unionism and economic prosperity. According to Keynesian thought, unions, supporting the growth of wages and mass consumption, were expected to provide some aggregate demand and limit the arrival of major economic depressions. This macro-economic rationality of collective bargaining was also well established in the National Labour Relations Act of 1935, legislation that led to the mass, phenomenon of trade unionism in the United States. However, in an economy of free trade, there is no guarantee that unionized workers will spend their earnings in household products. The wage increases demanded by unions can equally well be used to purchase imported goods. Thus, awareness campaigns for the purchase of Union Label have failed in the United States and Canada. Jacoby argues that "*whereas traditional wage bargaining and generous social welfare benefits once were regarded as public goods, they are viewed now as a drag on national efficiency, and not only by conservative economists*" (Jacoby, 1995, pp. 8-9).

However, it is important to qualify that because, according to Dwayne, Gunderson and Riddell, the reality is quite different: in specific industries union labour has been found to be more productive, in some cases substantially so, than comparable non-union labour (...). The direction and magnitude of the effect appears to depend on the management response to unionization, the quality of labour-management relations, and perhaps the degree of

product market competition. But Hodson and Sullivan show that unions reduce profits of companies, creating a negative attitude on the part of capitalists and their representatives (Hodson and Sullivan, 2002: 162). On the other hand, unions have historically imposed their demands on employers through collective bargaining to the extent that local markets allowed them to take WAGES out of competition (Jacoby, 1995: 8, Sexton, 2001: 80). But "*l'expansion des marchés a rendu difficile pour les syndicats d'accomplir une de leurs missions classiques qui est d'empêcher la concurrence sur les salaires*" (Chaykowski & Giles, 1998, p. 6). Such a commitment is possible only in the context of a national economy where firms have little mobility.

Today, markets are no more sheltered from international competition and trade unions are unable to equalize wages at this level, especially since the laws governing union certifications differ so much from one country to another that it is difficult for the union to extend its power. Moreover, the disparity of existing social legislation allows companies to place the states in competition for standards and social protection. Benchmarking allows companies to obtain concessions on work rules in exchange for promises of future investments (Levesque and Murray, 2003: 5). It is generally accepted that the modern corporation can relocate its production without incurring undue hardship. Employers now have the power to threaten workers to relocate production in the event of unionization or to extract concessions from the union during negotiations (Bronfenbrenner, 2000, p. 8).

How can a union protect its members if the company is able to evade the requirements of the country by relocating? This mobility reduces the bargaining power of unions (and also the number of their members). Just think of the Shermag of Disraeli company who, after three labour disputes, wanted to transfer part of its production in China under the pretext of the inflexibility of the unionized workforce. Today, businesses demand greater flexibility to adapt quickly to change. But as argued by Hyman, "*flexibility is [...] a slogan of those who wish to weaken and restrict labour-market protections, asking workers more disposable and more adaptable to the changing requirements of the employer*" (Hyman, 1999: 108). Several authors stress the importance of the problem of asymmetry between capital mobility and labour mobility (Mehmet, Menders & Sinding, 1999, p. 17-18). Companies are in a strong position and may seek competitive advantages in selecting locations governed by advantageous working, policies or, significantly lower cost of labour. A recent advertising campaign of the multinational Nike adequately illustrates this new world order. We see hockey players (it could just as well be businesses) play their way outside the boundaries of the rink while the goalkeeper (the union) and the arbitrator (the government) are limited in their movements. Specifically, companies are able to play "global" while the unions are confined to "act locally" (Cairo, 2000, p. 29).

However, remember that all authors do not put the same size: The effective mobility of capital is far more limited than one might think, because of the local overlapping investments, markets and expertise. Companies are prisoners of their own strategies and have to contend with the constraints inherent in the implementation of these strategies (Murray, 2001, p. 245). For Caire, workers in developed countries fear that globalization has negative effects such as rising unemployment, reduced wages, deteriorating working conditions and the loss of their freedom of action (2000, p. 21 - 22). And in the long run, globalization should lead to wage convergence at the international level for workers with similar productivity. But at the same time, it is likely that globalization leads to greater

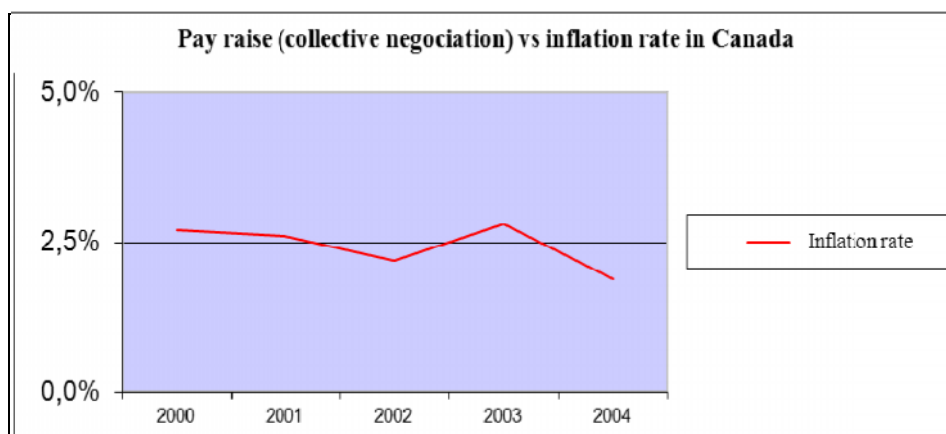
wage diversity in developed countries: wages of less skilled workers will decline (because of competition from the South), while those of most qualified and competent employees will increase as demand for these services is growing (Chaykowski & Gunderson, 2001, p. 31-36). Consequently, in most industrialized countries, high wages can be sustained on the basis of higher productivity and development of higher skills and qualifications of workers. This presents both new challenges and new opportunities for trade unionism. Although unions seem to slowly lose their influence in the determination of wages, emphasize that Canadian workers still get an average \$ 5.00 more per hour of work when they are represented by a union (CTC, 2005). Similarly, the wage gap is even greater among women, while unionized female workers earn on average 60% more than the others (Ibid).

More generally as regards North America, Kuhn shows that unionized workers earn on average 15% more than non-unionized (Kuhn quoted by Gunderson and Hyatt, 2001: 392). Similarly, Bourque contends that union members earn on average 10% more than non-unionized workers, but the gap has decreased since it was 15% a few years ago (Bourque, 2005: Business p .2). From the 1980s, the loss of union power is also evidenced by a decline in the purchasing power of employees. This means a break with the trend observed since the early twentieth century until the late 1970s, a period during which the real wages of workers had increased from 9% to 55% per decade (Rouillard, 2004, pp. 271-272).

Table 1. Growth in average real wages per decade in Quebec, 1980-2000 (in percentage)

	Weekly wage (whole industries)	Weekly wage (manufactures)	Hourly wage (whole industries)	Hourly wage	Collective agreement wage
1980- 1990		- 10,3		- 4,5	- 4,6
1983- 1990	- 3,6	- 3,4	- 5,2	- 3,1	- 5,6
1990- 2000	3,6	- 3,6	- 2,5	- 0,5	- 3,0

Similarly, in recent years, pay raises obtained through collective bargaining have closely followed the rate of inflation, which was surpassed by the first only twice (2001 and 2002). This trend highlights a rather defensive attitude of unions, which would be satisfied to simply maintain the status quo.



Source: Statistics Canada

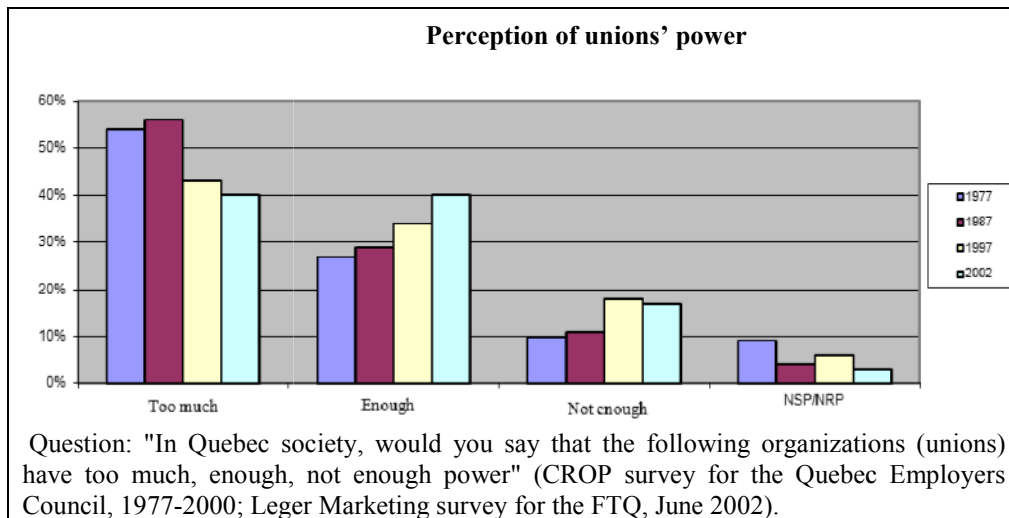
Finally, and in another vein, a sign of the times that highlights the decline of union power is the evolution of labour conflicts during the past decades. Assuming that the right to strike is one of the measuring instruments of union power, the figures show that unions are more than before, in a position that makes it difficult to use his weapon.

Table 2. Labour disputes in Quebec (1966-2000): Annual averages per period of 5 years

Periods	Days/persons	% lost time	Number	Length/working days
1966-70	1 546 004	0,35	143,2	26,3
1971-75	2 430 440	0,46	260,8	24,4
1976-80	3 572 051	0,61	343,0	35,0
1981-85	1 541 356	0,26	297,6	40,0
1991-95	481 200	0,06	145,2	41,6
1996-00	486 673	0,06	122,2	50,5

Source: *Strikes and lockouts in Quebec, Ministry of Labour of Quebec (Boivin, 2002, p. 11)*

In short, borrowing the ideas of Lapointe (1998), we can say that traditional sources of union power, namely "*sa capacité de soustraire les salaires et les conditions de travail à la concurrence du marché et d'obtenir des améliorations par les grèves ou le simple fait d'en brandir la menace*", have been seriously affected by economic developments mentioned above, the new balance of forces is now more favourable to employers. However, it is interesting to note that in the eyes of public opinion in Quebec, the power of unions seems not affected. In fact, despite the decrease from the 1970s, a large majority still believes that the union actor has a fairly significant and even excessive power.



3.2 Autonomous Levers

The FTQ-FUND College

Since January 17, 2000, there is the *Quebec FTQ-FUND College*, a new labour 'college' devoted to advanced training and professional development of trustees of the affiliated unions (FTQ, 26th Congress). The training program aims to equip those advisors to the new realities of the labour market, particularly with regard to the reorganization of companies internationally, precarious employment, declining rates of unionization and increased poverty due to the phenomena mentioned above. Being better equipped to face the new labour realities, union advisors strengthen their influence by their presence and leadership. They'll, therefore, become actors proactive and able to represent the interests of workers and, therefore, to influence the political-economic agenda in Quebec. In addition, the FTQ-Fund College is also a strategy for trade union succession planning and activists of tomorrow.

We have seen that the union actor is a victim of globalization and changes in employment resulting there from. However, some more optimistic authors oppose the view of the unambiguous weakening of union power. The unions would then be well able to develop new power resources to counteract the current imbalance. Levesque and Murray (2003) also speak of a *strategic triangle for union action*. It would consist of three resources that are able to develop an independent project, the internal solidarity and the external solidarity (Levesque and Murray, 2003: 9). These three resources are mutually reinforcing dynamic in the revival of the collective power of workers (Levesque and Murray, 2003: 10). Regarding the first factor, it should be noted that for some authors, and in reality, trade unions play a protective role for workers but also a role of social change agents (Boivin & Guilbault, 1989, p. 77). If the union actor seeks to draw on different values and to propose alternative projects, it must develop its capacity to promote them in the same way that companies have been able to do so. It goes without saying that suggesting projects generates less defensive

results. It is up to unions to take autonomous positions to help strengthen a renewed collective identity and different from that of the employer. That's when the unions would possess more power to feed the development effort to organize the current context.

Similarly, always in critic and alternative view of system, unions will have to convince workers and citizens that the trade union agenda reflects their concerns to get them to become more involved in the movement. They must spread the idea that a profound social transformation in favour of fairness, the "common good" or of "living together" is not only possible but preferable to the dominant speech based around the concept of Competitiveness notion which, according to Petrella, only serves to fuel the dream of the dominant (Petrella, 2004: 64). In short, it is important that companies are not the only ones to tell the world and to convey ideas. Moreover, the debate between a radical socio-economic transformation and adaptation of unionism to the existing system is well known by the trade unions in Quebec. Note, for example, that the rather radical guidelines of largest Quebec trade unions during the 1970s. In a report of the FTQ, the title speaks for itself, *L'État rouage de notre exploitation* (1971), the president of the Central Association virulently denounced the system in place: "*L'État libéral (fédéral et québécois) renforce avec notre argent le pouvoir économique privé, ce qui permet d'accroître chez-nous le développement du capitalisme et la mainmise de l'impérialisme sur notre vie économique*"(in Solasse, 1994: 137). Moreover, in 1976, still in a line dedicated to the establishment of socialism in Quebec, the FTQ openly manifest themselves in favour of "*d'un contrôle accru de la collectivité sur ses moyens de production présentement aux mains d'intérêts privés pour la plupart étrangers*"(in Solasse, 1994, p. 138).

For its part, the CSN was no less radical in its thinking, as evidenced by the manifest *Ne comptons que sur nos propres moyens* (1971) outlining the cleavage between the ideology of the Union and the system in which it fits. According to Marcel Pépin, President of the Union at the time, "*les travailleurs doivent posséder l'économie*". It then proposes an agenda that seems to be focused on self-management (Solasse, 1994, p. 143). The effects of changes occurred from the mid-1970s will be felt on the agenda of trade unions, resulting in large ideological swings and new programs of action, particularly since the 1990s. The criticism of the system will soften and Unions will begin to qualify their positions of adversarial type. Pragmatically, they now promote a more harmonious coexistence with the employers. This time, Mr. Godbout, President of the FTQ, said in 1995 that: In this new dynamic, he says, the philosophy of 'them against us' is an old shot. (...)

In general, models of nasty grumbling union and capitalist exploiter correspond less and less to the reality of today's Quebec. While these models will screen between the social partners and the new reality, we fail in our cooperation efforts. Let's dare to act differently (in Rouillard, 2004, p. 228). Then in 1998, during a speech to members, this same President expressed his concern for business productivity with the phrase "*pas d'entreprise, pas de travail, pas de travail, pas de syndiqué: l'équation est simple et implacable*"(in Rouillard, 2004, p. 227). As it is concerned, the CSN adopts a similar approach but keeps a prudential distance vis-à-vis the business goals in order to preserve its independence. During the 1990s, the CSN moves towards a position in favour of "compromise" with companies, at that time known as the old saying "confrontational dialogue."

The Alcan case

1993. *The Alcan smelter opens a new subsidiary in Laterrière. It is the group's first subsidiary operating with the latest technology and autonomous teams of workers. This successful partnership in the production management is due, for Belanger (Belanger, 2001), to three principles: equity, efficiency and independence. Working in self-managed teams, workers perform their job functions under positions whose duties have been clearly defined. In addition, each worker within the team performs a rotation of duties. Everyone knows exactly what he has to do, depending on each position. In addition, each team member is accountable for decisions taken in respect of production operations. The team members agreed on a method of working, and moreover, it doesn't exist within the company, different work bodies or differential wage treatment: each member was given the same remuneration. The effectiveness of plant operation is based on the experience of workers and their decision-making capacity. The plant supervision is accomplished through a highly sophisticated technology; it allows supervisors to monitor productivity of each worker and team operations from their offices. In short, supervisors are not present in plant and importantly, they wisely analyze the information they have, that is to say they use these data to ensure production operations and not as an instrument of control over workers. The independence of workers, unlike direct supervision of production, enhances their skills and, as such, does not refer to a merger with the employer. As one worker in the factory: "ils ont l'usine pendant 8 heures, nous on l'a pendant 16 heures" (Belanger, 2001, p. 163). In short, the study at Alcan by Belanger concludes that the cooperation in business does not necessarily mean loss of autonomy for a union and may even be a source of power and legitimacy.*

However, as regards the public sector, this position will be dropped later at the end of the decade because of pressure from disillusioned members of cooperation attempts involving too expensive concessions (Rouillard, 2004, pp. 233-234). At present, we find that the overthrow of the capitalist system is no longer the agenda of the trade union. But the questions on their part vis-à-vis neoliberalism are no less numerous, as evidenced by the campaigns and protest of the CSN, for example in respect of the Labour Code amendments initiated by the government of Jean Charest. In this way, despite the abandonment of the radical positions of the 1970s and 1980s, Quebec unionism reaffirms its social and remains far from the U.S. business unionism. Moreover, for some authors, the search for new ways to organize the actor requires a thorough reform of the system.

In fact, it is possible that trade unions, confronted with this new reality, decided to cross the Rubicon, not to wage war, but rather to cooperate with their old adversary and fit into a virtuous cycle of cooperation - Partnership - which would cause it to generate profits for workers and profits for businesses, while promoting the general interest of society (Rubinstein, 2001: 582-583). According to Rubinstein, "*Unions will survive in the long run only if their forms 'fit' the structure of the economy and industrial organization and they contribute to the strength of the economic system in ways that also promote the interests of their members*". The comments above are part of the current "value added unionism" (Nissen, 2003). The followers of this current suggest that unions are redefining their purpose, to become organizations offering earnings to businesses and whole economy. Also according to this thinking, the unions must abandon their traditional claims (seniority rules, fixed wages, job classification, etc...) and their "adversarial" nature. By means of training

and participation in company management, unions can find a new place to better represent the interests of workers.

By helping to increase productivity and profitability, and therefore to economic growth, trade unions may strengthen their social legitimacy (Nissen, 2003, pp. 134-138). In this line of argument, Heckscher has enough persuasive arguments "*(unions) have to push their specialized interests in a way that also maximizes the interests of the whole...In the New Deal era they were linked to the Keynesian economics of demand stimulus. Since the late 1970s, however, the public focus has shifted to concern about inflation and competitiveness. Higher wages for union members are no longer widely seen as translating into prosperity for all; this is a fatal weakness that tends to isolate unions during defining moments of conflict. Second, and related, unions can succeed only if they essentially contribute to good management, not if they fundamentally undermine it. In fact, they have functioned by making deals that are in the long-term interests of management as well as employees... [Emphasis added]*" (2001, p. 62).

Fondaction

"Fondaction" is a response to socio-economic involvement of the CSN and its concern for maintaining employment. The latter relies on the collective savings and investment. Since its creation in 1996, Fondaction aims to stimulate the Quebec economy by investing in Quebec companies and, therefore, contribute to maintaining and creating jobs in Quebec. The fund has a preferred orientation with respect to the so-called participatory management companies, as well as social enterprises, for example, cooperatives and enterprises concerned with the environment. Fondaction has supported more than 25 companies since 1998 in Quebec City and Chaudière-Appalaches, and nearly a hundred in Quebec. Take, for example, the ambulance cooperative of the Mauricie (ambulance service), the labour cooperative Débitek (manufacture of particle board), Kirouack Group (retail of toys), ice hotel of Quebec Canada (adventure tourism) Platform (CPT manufacturing recycled flooring), and many others (Source: www.fondaction.com).

Notwithstanding, the partnership is not the panacea to the imbalance of power between the company and the union because it can weaken worker solidarity. The partnership establishes a high interlocking between the company and the union of its own workers. The link made between the existence of two social actors may place the union in a perfect position of dependence vis-à-vis the company. Therefore, the partnership may lead to disconnection of any claim outside the firm, and therefore the labour movement in general, and adoption of a *micro-corporatism* undermining the possibility of taking the working conditions and wages from competition. To cite Levesque and Murray: Such unions [speaking of micro-corporatism] are more often than not isolated. Horizontal linkages with other unions established in the same area or community are virtually non-existent and vertical linkages with regional branch structures, national and international, often appear unsophisticated (Levesque & Murray, 2003, p. 17). It does not take much for the partnership to ruin any form of solidarity and sense of community within the labour movement. Moreover, the duality of roles induced by the partnership places the union at a disadvantage because of the conflict that may arise between its position as business partner and patron and claimant of the employee rights (Bourque & Rioux, 2001, p. 349). The

difficulty for the union to maintain a balance between these two divergent roles can lead it to a weakening.

In short, is to be feared the creation of puppet unions subject to the interests of the company and completely disconnected from the labour movement. Also note the comments of Ms. Lamoureux, an economist at the CSN. She upholds that the development of partnerships is now part of the trade union agenda because unions are convinced that it is in their interest to ensure economic development and prosperity of businesses. However, according to Ms. Lamoureux, a successful partnership is based on mutual trust and transparency of the employer; otherwise it will be doomed to failure. In fact, this new approach is the premise of the functioning of Fondation allowing the CSN to establish partnership arrangements with companies. A Fondation team of professionals in economy is part of the Board of Directors of the Company (CSN, 2005).

The second resource of union power by Murray and Levesque is the internal solidarity. It relies heavily on the democratic aspect of the union structure. This solidarity is power because it strengthens the internal cohesion and revives the confidence of workers towards the association that represents them. When a union is listening to its members and they have the opportunity to engage in union activities, claims ideas emerge from the base and is not only an important step in the formation of a specific union agenda, but also in building an independent identity. As Levesque and Murray argue, "*le syndicat d'établissement qui jouit d'une grande légitimité auprès de ses adhérents, en raison de la vitalité de sa solidarité interne, exerce une plus grande influence sur l'employeur*" (2003, p. 16). The democratization of trade unions is therefore a sine qua non for the emergence of internal solidarity. A union is democratic if it has rules that help to counterbalance the powers of the union executive and promote the existence of opposing factions and electoral competition of different candidates.

But the real union democracy should not comply with a "representative" character. It should also mean a direct involvement of members in the process of making decisions. To this end, it is desirable that the members are directly engaged in the formulation of union rules, in the collective bargaining process, in monitoring the union administrators and in the organization and activities of the union. But is such a commitment still possible? In fact, it seems that the vocation trade unionism is no longer the preferred. During our interview with Ms. Lamoureux, she confirmed that: the members can't give much time, and therefore, long-term involvement in union life, since they already have too little time to spend with their families. They are more likely to take on short terms and to participate in causes that are important to heart.

Faced with this lack of participation, the CSN has done "a tour of the executive" in all regions of Quebec to inspire the mobilization of its troops and to solicit workers to participate and become involved in the association action. It has also established a National Youth Committee in 1985 with a mandate to promote exchanges within the organization about issues relevant to young adults (source: www.csn.qc.ca). Finally, the third resource of power is external solidarity. However, binding to the outside is not a new phenomenon among unions. Just think of the expansion of union representation in all schools nationally, for example in the automotive industry in order to take the working conditions and wages out of the competition. However, unions have had little success in building international alliances able to lead to significant results (Chaykowski & Giles, 1998).

As Hyman argues, "*it is easy to recognize that an urgent current need is for new models of transnational solidarity and for enhanced capacity for transnational intervention*" (Hyman, 1999: 112). To counter the globalization forces, trade unionism must, first, overcome its local divisions and, on the other hand, exceed its national structure to acquire a size comparable to the companies with which future negotiations will take place about working conditions and social protection. Hyman's remarks are relevant to the issue: In an epoch when the traditional arena of trade union intervention – the national/sectorial level – has diminished in relevance in the face of the challenges from above (global market forces and transnational capital) and below (decentralization to the individual company and workplace), traditional recipes are often ineffective [...] *What is necessary is the development of new channels for the production and communication of trade-union intelligence* [Our italics.] (Hyman, 1999, p. 111).

Ravenswood Aluminum Corporation

The U.S. company Ravenswood Aluminum Corporation refuses to yield to the demands of Local 5668 of United Steelworkers of America (USWA) and then proceed to hire scabs to continue its activities. However, the Local persuades the union to organize a national campaign to boycott goods produced by this company, and this by using new information technologies and communications (including Internet). Subsequently, the National Union obtained after exposing the criminal behaviour of the conglomerate's major shareholders which include Ravenswood, the allegiance of other unions at the international level as well as the support of politicians. Here, several groups rallied to the cause and considerably pressured companies within the conglomerate in question. And ultimately, the company had in its own interest, resolve the labour conflict in a hurry (see Herod, 2002, pp. 89-92).

However, Herod believes that while globalization may mean tougher competition between workers of different countries, it can also facilitate the matching of workers throughout the world and generate new opportunities for solidarity (Herod, 2002, p. 96). In this regard, Giles reminds us that: unionism, despite its many national variations, is an international phenomenon par excellence: national trade union movements were not constructed out of whole cloth, but were each shaped, from their very origins, through the transnational diffusion of ideas, practices and organisational forms (2000, p. 187). In fact, international solidarity is the origin of the formation of unions at the global and regional levels. Globally, we must mention the existence of three confederations, whose action system is considered by Caire as "*un lieu de production symbolique visant à mobiliser des soutiens, légitimer des options, redéfinir des utopies*" (2000, p. 22).

1. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), originally anti-communist, then oriented towards social democracy, is described by Noblecourt (2004) as "*un colosse aux pieds d'argile...qui a renforcé son hétérogénéité idéologique*". He argues that the ICFTU includes 233 organizations in 152 countries and 151 million members.
2. The World Confederation of Labour (WCL), originally Christian (CISC), but unchristianized in 1969. According to Noblecourt (2004), it boasts 144 member unions, located in 116 countries and 26 million adherents, and seems torn between

a South American progressive wing and conservative anti-communist east-European wing.

3. The Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), parentage Communist and, Caire, now moribund.

Currently, the ICFTU (the CSN is a member) and the WCL established a Joint Permanent Forum and initiated negotiations which should lead to their merger and the creation of a new global confederation (Noblecourt, 2004). In this way, workers throughout the world will have the support of a "mega-union" able to establish itself as a more powerful social interlocutor against international agencies, governments of various countries in the world and multinational companies. Probably he will play an important role in the establishment of an international legal framework designed to ensure effective respect for fundamental rights of workers. In fact, we can affirm that the international instruments adopted within the ILO, OECD and certain international trade agreements (social clauses) should suffice for this purpose if the States finally agree to give them mandatory. But now, they still belong to the category of "soft law", so that until today, the interests of capital have prevailed on the international stage.

But while we are witnessing the construction of stronger global union organizations, victorious battles are taking place against the transnational corporations, as shown by Herod (see Ravenswood case). In some cases, the strategy is to develop international activities that mobilize workers in different places on the planet.

In other cases, the key to success is well articulated in campaigns at the local level benefitting from the Achilles heels of new production systems adopted by transnational corporations (Herod, 2002, 89-99). In this regard, Van Liemt says that (workers) should feel stronger in firms that rely more on just-in-time production and outsourcing, as they are more vulnerable to disruption of supplies. After all, are needed just a few people working to manufacture a key component to stop all production (2004: p. 236). To Herod, the high speed that employers have imposed on the production is a double-edged sword, because it gives them less time to react in case of conflict (2002, p. 88). Even ICTs that promote the exacerbated mobility of capital may be at the service of employees to bring new links of solidarity.

In this regard, Hyman provides a quite interesting example: Modern information technologies offer the potential for labour movements to break out of the iron cage which for so long has trapped them in organizational structures which mimic those of capital. The Liverpool dockers, in their long but ultimately unsuccessful struggle against a ruthless employer, used e-mail and the world-wide web to great effect in campaigning for international solidarity. In more routine ways, intelligent use of new modes of information and communication can assist in the work of consciousness building and representation (Hyman, 1999: 112). By cons, Johns warns, however, on the various facets of international solidarity, distinguishing between "*accommodationist solidarity*" and "*transformatory solidarity*". The first is actually a disguised protectionism to avoid relocation, which could mean job transfer from North to South, for example by encouraging workers to unionize the South so they are less attractive to potential investors. In contrast, the second involves the

principles claims formulation for workers without regard to their country of origin (Herod, 2002, p. 96).

Similarly, unions can take an additional force of any alliance being formed with an external support network allowing them to extend the impact of their action and coordinate it with other forces of dispute, including community groups, students, anti-globalization, environmental, feminist, religious, civil rights, etc... For example, UNITE has mobilized many of these groups and promoted the adoption of ethical codes in the garment industry to protect workers. By diametrically attacking the image of fashion companies, the strategic alliance between protest groups experienced a significant success. For example, Levi Strauss claims to have discontinued contracts with thirty of his sub-contractors for breaches of code (Cavanagh, 1997, p. 41). Only by developing international alliances that unions can adopt an effective takeover on the global market. They need all the available forces, in all continents, to find as much power as they once held at the national level and on which they had been able to rely for the satisfaction of working class claims. Moreover, the federations of the CSN have begun in recent years the establishment of networks of international scope. For example, the Federation of Workers of the Paper and Forest (FTPF-CSN), became affiliated to an international federation of the ICFTU, namely the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mines and General Workers' Unions. The aim was for the Federation to have an international look at the pulp and paper because paper companies have become multinationals. And as pointed out by Sylvain Parent, president of the FTFP: "*on ne pouvait plus se limiter à notre connaissance du Québec. Nos syndiqués voulaient savoir ce qui se passaient dans le papetières d'Abitibi-Consol en Angleterre et aux États-Unis, ainsi que dans celles de Cascades et Kruger en France, au Venezuela, et en Colombie*".

Heroic resistance and disempowerment of the State

"11 janvier 1999. Heure bleue. La nouvelle résonne sur le jour qui tombe. En pleine négociation, Bell Canada offre un contrat à ses 7 200 techniciens, mais demande aux téléphonistes, membres de la même unité d'accréditation (SCEP), de se débrancher. Les services seront vendus à une multinationale de l'Arizona, propriétaire de centres d'appels. Dorénavant, on n'entendra plus les voix de ces femmes du « 0 » ou du « 411 », de la téléconférence et de l'aide aux malentendants"(www.onf.ca/dernier).

This affiliation greatly facilitates the exchange of information and allows Quebec paper firms to better respond to international competition (Kishka, 2004). Before concluding about the autonomous levers of union power, let's specify that Hyman did not fully share the optimism of Levesque and Murray when he questioned not the possible expansion of the solidarity of the labour movement, but the very survival of the latter. By compartmentalizing the workers, unions have traditionally compartmentalized solidarity. Also according to Hyman, it must then reinvent labour solidarity (Hyman, 1999: 107). Thus, mechanical solidarity that reflects and reproduces the Fordist production mode, that is to say that based on a male workforce, homogeneous and working in a large institution, must give way to an organic solidarity, that is to say which replaces the Fordist organizational compliance by coordinating the diversity of workers (Hyman, 1999:107). Building organic solidarity is not impossible since the unions concentrate their activities on new concerns that can unite the fragmented interests from unifying principles. According to

Hyman, this can be done, for example, by pointing to the contradictions generated by the theme of flexibility, developing mechanisms to promote security and employability of workers in the labour market, and building structures for career advancement opportunities and occupational mobility. The three issues mentioned above would bring the workers together. Hyman concludes by arguing that "the logic of all these themes is the reassertion of rights of labour as against the imperatives of capital " (Hyman, 1999, p. 111).

3.3. Heteronomous Levers

According to Rouillard, union crisis is also linked to the absence of a legislative framework in harmony with the socio-economic developments of recent decades: both Quebec and federal (laws), they change little while the labour market is changing significantly. Employees find themselves less protected, more subject to market rules. The greater freedom accorded to economic forces probably generates wealth, but the workers, unionized or not, do not benefit (Rouillard, 2004, p. 279). In fact, our work regulation is based on a traditional work model, i.e. function of an employment relationship of indefinite duration with the same employer within his company.

Specifically, at present, one of the most controversial aspects that occur in respect of Quebec work policies is the concept of "employee"¹. In order to benefit from social protection provided in respect of certain laws, the worker must meet the definition of "employee" found in the legislation. The employee is defined as someone who works for an employer in a particular place for an indeterminate period and remunerated². Thus, by the Labour Code, "employee" gets the right to belong to an association of employees to participate in the formation of this association, its activities and its administration. Thus, workers who do not meet the definition of employee, as provided in the various labour laws, do not enjoy social protection. At the same time, the Quebec laws do not restrict the right of companies to use the so-called atypical workforce. All forms of work remain accessible, virtually without restriction, fixed-term employment, part-time work, casual employees or on call. There are no rules limiting the use of agency employees, temporary help. So, depending on their needs, employers have decided to use a labour-time, called non-traditional, in order to obtain greater flexibility and lower costs of labour. These practices explain that a significant proportion of the workforce, i.e. atypical workers or contractors, can't be protected by various social laws or measures negotiated in collective agreements.

Thus begins the long struggle of the Bell Canada telephone operators, mostly women (99%) with an average seniority of 20 years, "presque la moitié de leur vie active" within the company (ditto). Convinced of the importance and value of their work, they moved into battle again. They had already fought in 1979-1980, during a first strike, then again in 1985-1992, to achieve pay equity. Not only do they see whole years of work being annihilated, but in addition, they believe in a misogynistic act against them: women have

¹ In particular the Labour Code, the Labour Standards Act, the Workers 'Compensation Act and Workers' Compensation and Occupational Diseases.

² The Bernier report makes welfare status of the worker clear: "la première constatation qui s'impose est qu'en général l'accessibilité (aux régimes de protection) se détermine par le statut de salarié (inclusion) par opposition au statut de non salarié (exclusion) ".

no right to be treated as equals with their male counterparts, so the company decided to cheaply "sell" (Martel, 1999). In 1985, operators were able to obtain the establishment of a Committee on Pay Equity. The committee's mandate was finally achieved in 1988 and in 1992 he filed a report striking: there is a disparity in pay between male jobs ranging between 11% and 20% and female jobs. To fill this gap, Bell had to increase the salary of the operators of \$ 4.18 per hour and it cost him three million dollars to settle this matter on equity (at the same time, the company has made profits of \$ 1.2 billion). This moment is the beginning of the end for the operators.

Despite these remarkable benefits, the company offers to the negotiating table in 1993, 1% pay equity adjustment, which boosted the telephonists. They then filed 1049 individual complaints to the Canadian Commission on Human Rights. The procedures are lengthy and hearings in this matter began only in 1996. We now know the reply from Bell: in January 1999, it announced to its operators that there would be no more calls...

Through a loophole in the Quebec labour code that Bell divested its operators to the benefit of a U.S. multinational. Indeed, the Quebec Labour Code is silent as to the sale of a federal company to a provincial. Thus, the bargaining unit and working conditions are not part of the agreement between the parties concerned. In contrast, the Code provides, where an enterprise of provincial jurisdiction is acquired by a federal firm, that the union certification and working conditions are maintained.

To justify its action, Bell argues its decision in favour of competition in the telecommunications sector and relies on economic reasons. We learn later that Bell and the U.S. multinational created a subsidiary called Nordia whose major shareholder Bell will be. The loophole will allow Bell to create new working conditions for its operators since it is not related to any union or collective agreement: no benefits and a pay cut of 50%. For Bell Canada, the sale of "telephonists" to Nordia saves labour costs, no matter how slight it is, when we know that the president of Bell Canada Enterprises wins in a day's pay an operator yearly wage, which is \$ 35,000.

The struggle of the Bell operators is presented by Caroline Martel in a film titled "Dernier appel, téléphonistes sur la ligne de front". The director powerfully demonstrates the results of this era of productivity race, this race for profits at the expense of working conditions and new technologies that dehumanized job in the name of sacrosanct performance. This struggle of Bell operators also demonstrates a major weakness in the Quebec Labour Code and the disempowerment of the state. Despite the public announcement of the Minister of Labour of the time, Diane Lemieux, on its willingness to amend the Labour Code in order to preserve the jobs of Bell operators, it will withdraw its support a few months later, leaving telephonists to their fate. Even co-workers and members of the same bargaining unit, technicians, will not take part in struggle for their sisters. Bell Canada has managed to divide the aspirations of technicians and operators. The technicians also obtained during the same round of negotiations, the union protections guaranteed in case of subcontracting.

May 12, 1999. "Au terme d'une grève de 36 jours, les téléphonistes ont réussi à sauvegarder 1 000 emplois et à bonifier les primes de départ. Malgré cela, Bell ferme 50 bureaux de téléphonistes au Québec et en Ontario" (Martel, 1999). The acquisition of the telephonists by Nordia has enabled Bell Canada to impose its own conditions, and with the help of new technologies, develop performance measures. The operators then see their

break timed as well as the time spent online with each client. Performance awards are granted in accordance with standards of "acceptable" response times for each answered customer.

The heroic struggle of the telephonists for equal work, equal pay had a painful end. These activists fought against Goliath, the telecommunications multinational and big opponents, the Quebec government, new technologies and globalization. In such an environment, the balance between the parties doesn't exist. There is no more service to the number you have dialled...

Thus, the failure in the regulation of temporary and atypical employment is obvious. For example, how to admit any longer that just 20% of part-time workers are represented by a union or even less than 11% of youth 15-24 years are (Vosko, 2000: 33)? In fact, a large proportion of new employment status develops in the service sector, where unionization is difficult (Valle 1996: 296). The accentuation of economic exchange has given new opportunities to the private services sector, which averaged growth of 2.4% per year between 1966 and 1995 (Ministry of Industry and Trade, 1996). Thus, Vosko (2000) warns that unionism is strong with declining jobs (e.g. manufacturing) and weak with growing jobs (services sector). Indeed, Canadian unions are experiencing difficulties with regard to accreditation procedures given the increasing heterogeneity of the workforce: the determination of the bargaining unit and assessing the representative character of an association of employees are more complex tasks (Vallee, 1999, p. 297). In another vein, the current institutional arrangements requiring decentralized bargaining, collective agreements may limit the ability of unions to protect workers and help improve their living conditions. The reduction in contract negotiations for work at the enterprise level limits their scope and prevents the establishment of national, regional or sectorial strategies able to respond to both market constraints and legitimate requirements of protection of employment and income for atypical workers (Moreau & Trudeau, 1998).

Finally, another juridical problem that must be highlighted is the limitation of its scope. While the effects of labour legislation are felt only in the country, trade is supposed to regulate it more than ever to play in the world (Murray, 2001: 247). Similarly, the regulatory mechanisms of supranational work are powerless. For example, the North American Cooperation (NAALC) does not allow complaints concerning freedom of association beyond simple collaborative consultation (Blouin and Morpaw). For its part, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has been qualified with rectitude of "dog with a soft bark and not much of a bite" (Mehmet, Menders & Sinding, 1999, p. 10). Ultimo, the emergence of companies within the United Nations ('Global Compact') clearly shows the influence they are able to exert on the functioning of the single means of expression of human rights existing at the moment worldwide.¹ This finding regarding the inadequacy of the existing legislative framework highlights that, notwithstanding the resources still available to the unions, the State must become more involved in creating an environment more favourable to organized labour. On the one hand, this seems unlikely as long as the government of Jean Charest is in power; on the other hand, let's not forget that the Parti Quebecois, which has made possible the reduction of Bell operators working conditions by

¹ The Global Compact is an agreement between the companies and the UN to finance the organization since many countries no longer pay their dues.

its legislative inaction. Therefore, the actuality of the heteronomous lever depends greatly on the ability of unions to exert effective pressure on the State and build strategic alliances with political actors.

4. Conclusion

Contrary to popular belief, don't oversize the effects of political, socio-economic and organizational changes, which have deepened since the early 1980s, on the Quebec union actor. In fact, statistics show that the decline in union density does not reach the dramatic levels of other countries. Moreover, despite the critical attitude common in the media, the fact remains that trade unionism is still perceived as a social need in the eyes of the majority of the population. Of course, fewer conflicts and loss of purchasing power of union members are there to show the relative weakness of trade unions at the moment. However, slowing the fall in wages since the year 2000 can be regarded as a sign that the worst is already past.

Furthermore, it is clear from the writings of Levesque and Murray (2001, 2003, 2004) that unionism is not without resources facing the transformations mentioned. However, the development of these resources is conditional on the adoption of a more proactive stance in speeches and proposals of the unions. They should be concerned about democratization, participation and involvement of members in their activities beyond their national structure and to gain the weight necessary to balance the forces. Overall, this transformation will require a refocusing of the union struggle on common goals rather than supporters. But even if the union actor was able to make internal adjustments, they would be insufficient without the reform of a legal framework, which is inadequate and even hostile towards the unions, hence the importance of a repositioning of the State in its relationship with the social partners.

Ultimately, it was shown that workers need an organized voice capable of asserting their interests and rights. And as long as the capitalist mode of production is in effect, the unions and their claimant role will be required. But is this role incompatible with efficiency and growth of the economy? We answer in the negative. If willing, the trade union actor can establish itself as an indispensable strategic partner in innovation, a protagonist of the training and mobilization of knowledge, a proponent of employability and, therefore, the employment. In this way, the unions will be legitimate not only in the eyes of employees, but for society as a whole, including its employers counterpart, since it will contribute to improving the cohesion of society, but also social performance and economic enterprises.

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