Adapting While Resisting: the Ambivalence of Union Action in the Face of Lean Production

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Abstract:
This article uses a survey of three French industrial establishments to examine the persistent difficulties of unionists to make issues of work organization a basis for collective action – especially when these issues result from lean production. The authors first revisit the ways in which lean management was introduced into each of these factories and the unionist critiques they occasioned, largely concentrated on dissent against the intensification of work and hierarchical pressure. The article then illustrates the ambivalence of surveyed unionists confronted with these reorganizations of work and the resulting fragility of worker mobilization, notably due to divisions generated both between unionists and among workers.

Keywords: organization of work – industrial restructuring –industrial conflict – unions

French union organizations have long been accused of abandoning issues concerning the organization of work to the hands of corporate management in order to focus exclusively on the matter of employment; this, at a time when work organization models were undergoing a profound transformation (Linhart et al., 1998). In the 2000s, the recognition of issues related to the intensification of work and to new professional risks, notably those generated by post-Taylorist models of organizing work,

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became important topics for unionists, who were renewing and increasingly turning their focus to occupational health issues that fueled workplace struggle (Goussard and Tiffon, 2017; Ponge, 2018). Between the beginning and the end of the 2000s – a period marked by the acceleration of firm restructurings in a context of economic crisis – there was even a significant increase in collective labor disputes related to working conditions: this motive is cited in 24% of establishments that declared the occurrence of a labor dispute (with or without work stoppage) between 2008 and 2010, as opposed to 15% between 2002 and 2004 (Giraud et al., 2014). The reorganizations and intensification of work taking place in French firms thus constitutes a central concern of labor disputes in France today; however, the ability of unionists to make these reorganizations of work a basis for collective struggle remains very inconsistent and often problematic (Gagnon, 2006; Delmas, 2014).

This article examines how unionists dealt with the implementation of models of organizing work inspired by lean production and the constraints on the possibilities for union action in the context of French industry in the 2000s. To do this, we rely on a survey carried out between 2012 and 2014 in three industrial establishments. These establishments of comparable size employed a majority of workers and have long-standing union representation, dominated by the CGT [General Confederation of Labor] (cf. table)[4].

Firms surveyed

	FOUNDRY	**TRANSFORMERS**	**ENGINES**
Products	Metallic pieces for cars, then for	High-power electric transformers	Engines for road construction

[4] Some thirty interviews were conducted in these three firms with worker representatives and individuals from management in the context of a study for DARES [the French Ministry of Labor's Direction de l'Animation de la recherche, des Études et des Statistiques] based on the REPONSE survey (Giraud et al., 2014). All three types of employee representatives who participate on work organization issues in the French industrial relations system were interviewed: the trade union delegates who represent the unions in negotiations with the employer; the employee delegates in charge of bringing individual and collective employee complaints; and the representatives in the Hygiene, Safety and Working Conditions Committees (CHSCT).

	aeronautics and defense		
Workforce in 2011	428	238	288
Location	Corrèze	Rhône – Alpes	Picardie
Presence of union organizations (% of votes in 2012)	CGT (80% of votes) CFE-CGC	CGT (40%) CFDT (30%) UNSA (30%)	CGT (70%) CFDT (until 2007, then cessation) FO (since 2008) – became majority with 51% of votes in 2014
% of union members (according to the represent-ative asked)	16%	10%	10%

Since the 1980s, these three establishments have undergone profound changes in their ways of organizing work and managing industrial relations. First came the restructurings, which almost always entail layoffs. Then the 2000s saw the introduction of lean management[5]. Finally, human resource offices developed an increased use of employee participation policies and a growing institutionalization of collective bargaining.

This article first presents these reorganizations of work and the union critiques they elicited (1); it then illustrates the ambivalence of unionists faced with these reorganizations of work and the resulting fragility of worker mobilizations, notably due to the divisions they generated both between unionists and among workers. Indeed, even if the mechanisms of negotiation and participation that accompanied these restructurings did not effectively eliminate labor disputes, the unionists made use of them in ambiguous ways that resulted in difficulties conceiving and constituting questions of work organization as an issue of collective action (2).

[5] Lean management, or simply "lean", is a production management approach that seeks to eliminate "waste" and to produce as efficiently as possible by optimizing quality, productivity, timelines, and costs. Our surveys make use of the term though it often covers various other practical forms.

I – Unionists Confronted with New Forms of Organizing Work

The three firms surveyed underwent the transition from capitalist family management to belonging to international financialized groups. The factory in Picardie was founded in the 19th century to manufacture threshing machines under the aegis of an engineer from the Arts et Métiers school. It was bought at the end of the 1980s by subsidiaries of ENGINES, a global leader in manufacturing machines for construction that employs approximately 130,000 people and is present on all continents. ENGINES bought the factory to own directly in 2000. Belonging to a family group based in Corrèze, FOUNDRY was established after 1945 to manufacture automotive parts. It was affected by the economic crisis of the 1970s and bought by Péchiney in 1986. The production was reoriented toward aeronautics and defense as the factory was resold several times over to foreign groups for reasons of financial valuation. On the verge of filing for bankruptcy in the 1990s, TRANSFORMER, founded by one of France's leading industrial groups, was also sold and resold several times before a US pension fund modernized the site between 2006 and 2011. Revenues increased by 142% between 2006 and 2009, and the firm became profitable once more, but it was put up for sale yet again in 2009 – the market prospects for the following years were not as promising on a market with long cycles. An investment fund based in Lyon and ten of the company's senior executives finally bought it in 2011.

1.1. Restructurings and lean management: the shared experience of French industry workers

In the three factories surveyed, the number of workers was affected by these capital-intensive changes, leading to a succession of collective redundancy procedures via social plans (PSE Employment Safeguard Program) over thirty years, similar to those witnessed by the rest of the French industrial sector. Before belonging to ENGINES, the Picard factory had 500 employees; the workforce dropped to 200 at the end of the 1980s before climbing to 450 in the 2000s, partly through the intensive use of temporary workers. The 2008 crisis saw the volume of activity decrease by two thirds: all temporary worker contracts

were ended and some twenty employees left on early retirement. Finally, faced with an insufficient volume of orders, the site closed in 2015. While the factory at FOUNDRY counted 800 employees at the beginning of the 1980s, several redundancy plans (8 between 1981 and 2009) brought the number down to 230 "permanent" employees at the end of the 2000s. At TRANSFORMER, factory closure was brought up regularly and the workers witnessed "a PSE [redundancy procedure] every 3 or 5 years," according to a former employee. In this respect, these three factories perfectly illustrate the context of permanent restructurings endured by the French industrial sector, which has been in steady decline since the 1980s (over 25% of employees at the beginning of the 1980s, as opposed to 15% in 2007).

These restructurings were accompanied by reorganizations of work, which in the early 2000s took inspiration from the principles of lean production, with its stated goal of increasing productivity and the quality of the products manufactured. By reorienting its production from automotive parts to aeronautics, FOUNDRY moved from a serial industry to a very high value-added industry. To guarantee the firm's competitiveness, the management put emphasis on the improvement of product quality and delivery timelines. It was able to do this by initiating a project called "Envol" [Takeoff], which was based on the establishment of "autonomous production units", productivity indicators, time measurements, and *Kanban*[6] in certain workshops. At ENGINES, competition established between the group's factories across the world justified a complete overhaul of the organization of production, driven by new executives hired in the early 2000s. While the movement is inversed in the case of this firm – it is the model of the automotive industry that is imported here, in the form of production lines with sequenced work where each worker has a set of specific tasks – and the cycle times are longer, the standards and norms of production implemented are the same as those at FOUNDRY. The Kanban system (and the whole Toyotist system in general) is reflected through the use of differently colored cards to signal any taking of parts – triggering a resupply – or incidents of any size. The work is highly prescribed and at the same time accompanied by

[6] Kanban ("label" in Japanese) is a flow management method that relies on the principle of "just in time": orders are issued by a demand source further down the production line according to its needs, which regulates the production of a supply source preceding it on the line.

abundant ergonomic equipment (specific workbenches, high-performance machines) and a call to engagement in the workplace (card system to suggest solutions, handled by the quality control department; daily team meetings; etc.). These models of organizing work, typical of companies that have switched from a Taylorist organization to a model in accord with lean principles, as is also the case at TRANSFORMERS, can confer a certain autonomy to worker collectives, notably in the resolution of problems and incidents (Ugheto, 2012). Yet, these new forms of work organization are subject to no fewer resistances and critiques from employees and unionists.

1.2. A critical unionist view on the new organizations of work

Firstly, the establishment of these new work productivity models disrupted the dynamics between the supervisors and the workers. At ENGINES, the automation of production and the introduction of lean led to a change in recruitment practices – the profiles of the workers hired was no longer the same, as new employees were increasingly taken on to work as "assemblers" with no need for qualified training. Thus the director of human resources at ENGINES recounts that with the implementation of lean:

> "*we began to recruit people who were formerly bakers and butchers. And the workers said: well if these guys can do that, then what is a worker like me doing here? […] On the other side, we asked management to change, too, and that didn't happen without its own difficulties*."

The same account was given at FOUNDRY, with similar difficulties. The first attempt to implement lean, after 2006, even had to be abandoned:

> "*Certain workshop leaders couldn't see their place in this organization of work because for years they had been asked to direct humans, to have technical knowledge, and to manage the work on site. But now, theoretically, everything was managed by lean, and all they had to do was to say 'that worked' or 'you did or didn't keep time'. […] We asked them to be administrators and to stop managing the pieces and the workers. Some of them had a hard time of it.*" (the CFE-CGC [French Confederation of

Management-General Confederation of Executives] representative at FOUNDRY)

The CGT leaders at the establishment, all workers over 50-years-old, also had a critical view of these new forms of work organization, which management finally reintroduced in 2008. The CHSCT [Hygiene, Safety and Working Conditions Committee] Secretary primarily saw this as a factor in deconstructing work collectives, which exposed employees to new risks that the security equipment at their disposition did not really resolve by individualizing the management of security:

> "*We don't want to work like that: individual protection equipment has become a way of no longer dealing with risks at their source, because we're moving in all directions, we're no longer compartmentalized, so there are additional risks. But when we worked as a team, it was easier for us to coordinate, because we could evacuate a workshop that had too much smoke in it, for example. We organized things like that, amongst ourselves. With the new work organization, that's no longer possible.*" (CHSCT Secretary, CGT)

This unionist critique extends to the opposition of security rules and pressure on productivity objectives imposed by management:

> "*They make a big deal about security prevention, but what they're interested in is work-related accidents – but only because it costs them a lot, thankfully. Otherwise, we'd be working barefoot – they don't give a damn! They don't care about working conditions. The proof? Zero investment. We've been working with the same equipment since 1989. Work tools deteriorate.*" (CHSCT Secretary, CGT)

While the unionists at FOUNDRY recognize that their material working conditions have generally gotten better, they also consider that the improvement was made at the cost of an intensification of work and an increased control of their activity, questioning the legitimacy of their professional expertise and their capacity to correctly organize their work (Cru, 2014).

In fact, it is essentially against the repressive dimension of work reorganization policies in these three factories that unionist

leaders leveled their critiques and carried out actions. Their managements reduced break times and increased sanctions on lateness and absences. The questioning of "leniency systems" (Morel, 1980), which had until then characterized the management's policies in these establishments, was justified by the need to increase productivity and the quality of the goods produced. From this point of view, this questioning was also considered as a means to "regain control" of workers by challenging the margins of autonomy that certain of them had granted themselves due to the balance of power established by the unions and the arrangements made by former managers to keep the "social peace". From this perspective, the managements accompanied the implementation of these new models of work organization with a dual strategy. In contrast to what has been observed in Japan or in Italy, the introduction of lean management was not necessarily associated with a strategy of excluding unions from the firm (Leonardi, 2016). On the contrary, the managements sought to reinforce "social dialogue" practices with unionists with a view to developing trusting relationships with them and encouraging them to accompany managerial projects to reorganize their firms with greater cooperation. To develop "harmonious relationships with their social partners", directors of human resources did not hesitate, in our three firms, to multiply meetings (formal or no) and to maintain regular contact with employee representatives, encouraging them to partake in a logic of accompanying decisions made by management.

But, much more coercively, the managements reinforced control and sanction procedures for employees at the same time. The management at TRANSFORMER, for example, introduced a time clock system with card readers that allowed them to better identify "work stoppages" as well as they generalized medical counter-examinations for sick leave. The director of human resources at TRANSFORMER explained:

> "*Before, there were abuses of work time – absenteeism, because three days of absence were compensated, for example. The employees felt protected and they stopped working for minor reasons. And so we wanted to work on absenteeism, and we implemented different systems to deal with it.*"

In this context, the CGT representative pointed out that he dedicates a large portion of his work time to accompanying employees summoned for disciplinary review and to intervening with management and the labor inspectorate to protest against these forms of pressuring workers. At FOUNDRY, too, the unionists mobilized against the strengthening of absentee control: the CGT appealed to the labor inspectorate and encouraged the management to give up on this system of control that "serves only to make people feel guilty".

The unionists at ENGINES also focused their critique on the sectorization of work spaces, the introduction of breaks at fixed times, timed measurements, and injunctions issued to those who find themselves with a few minutes of free time to "not sit around doing nothing" and to systematically "go help co-workers ahead or behind on the line" – "to use absolutely all their working time" being "watched" by supervisors. The CGT activists threatened the management with union action if the control of cigarette breaks was not relaxed. And they succeeded:

> "*The director of HR never wanted to grant us anything – she led an immense war [over cigarette breaks]. This year, we weren't supposed to have any more cigarette breaks at all. When the new director arrived, he didn't want to get into the details of the fights between the workers, the unions, and the management. He split the difference and said he would give us seven minutes in the morning and seven minutes in the afternoon, paid by ENGINES – that doesn't cause fights, it reduces tensions. And it works great, people respect him.*" (an elected worker representative, CGT)

II – Faced with "Modernizations", Divisions within the Workers Group that Impede Union Action

The projects to modernize these factories did not go without resistance. This is best illustrated by the failure of FOUNDRY's modernization plan in 2006. Firm managements continue, moreover, to complain about problems with production quality, absenteeism, and tense social relations in their establishments. More broadly, despite very routinized exchanges with union representatives, managements fail to convert these representatives into accommodating partners in the

implementation of these new ways of organizing work. As such, even while the intensity of conflicts has decreased in comparison to the 1970-80s, these establishments still experience strike movements. Moreover, the statistical surveys demonstrate that the development of collective bargaining has not led to a decline in conflicts – on the contrary, strikes remain most frequent in establishments where collective bargaining is most frequent (Béroud et al., 2008). Yet, it is interesting to note that union action in these three establishments remained focused solely on resistance to employer sanctions and control of work times and rhythms judged too strict. That said, the unions did not truly initiate actions to protest against the disputed introduction of the new arrangements for organizing work At ENGINES in 2008, before the sudden decrease of activity, a strike was organized to denounce the new management practices of the "*petits chefs"* [managers or supervisors considered arrogant, authoritarian, etc.]. Further, the unions did not attempt to mobilize workers on the occasion of negotiations on job arduousness that the government had imposed in 2013[7]. Of course, these unionists, like unionists elsewhere, use tensions born of reorganizations as a support to mobilize around wage demands, yet they did not seem at all disposed to make the very source of these tensions into an issue for advocacy and mobilization We will concentrate next on understanding the multiple reasons that lead these union representatives dealing with work organization to distinguish between that which can be criticized and that which constitutes a motive for union action.

2.1. Difficulties constituting the organization of work as an issue for negotiation and collective mobilization

An initial explanation lies in the new constraints these unionists must deal with in mobilizing employees and negotiating with management. On one hand, these reorganizations take place in a context where their power to mobilize is greatly reduced due to

[7] In 2010, the government adopted a pension reform that provided for the lengthening of the working contribution period required to claim one's pension entitlements. In return, measures were taken to both anticipate and take into account the difficulty of working conditions in determining the retirement age for employees. From this perspective, firms were obliged, on pain of financial penalty, to conclude an agreement or to establish a unilateral action plan on the prevention of arduousness before the end of 2013, at the time when we were carrying out the investigation.

the combination of several factors. Firstly, the development of "atypical" contracts (temp work and fixed-term employment), which acts as a pool for recruitment, a means of adjusting the number of workers according to changes in activity, and a way to segment and create competition in the workforce so as to spark worker engagement (a principle of lean underscored by Pardi, 2009), weighs on the possible unionization and mobilization of a whole range of workers. In addition, the interviews illustrate an intense feeling of social insecurity generated by the constant succession of restructurings and the persistent threats of closure in these three factories. The unionists' rhetoric is fatalistic, as it has become difficult if not illusory to hope to be able to fight against the shareholders' power (Bory and Pochic, 2014). The unionists at FOUNDRY saw the age pyramid at their establishment (two-thirds of workers were over 50-years-old) as a clear sign that their management did not in any way count on ensuring the sustainability of their site. The CGT members at TRANSFORMER evoked the fact that "*we only have one thing to do – to hold on and to defend what we can*". This resignation is heightened by the fact that the factories are located in industrial parks where other plants have also undergone redundancy procedures or even been shut down. As such, according to the CGT representative at FOUNDRY, the local elected officials are abandoning industrial interests to invest in new, more attractive economic activities; it is thus very difficult to mobilize them. Likewise, he bitterly noted, the activity of the local CGT union is now more preoccupied with the last union bastions (public services in particular) than with the few remaining factories.

The erosion of the unions' activist strength and the repeated restructurings that they face contribute to a considerable reduction of possibilities available to unionists. Due to the limited resources at their disposition, they feel constrained to establish priorities among their actions. As wages at their institutions are low, this is seen as the most important issue as well as the easiest manner to mobilize their colleagues. But while the unionists perceive the effects of reorganizations clearly in the deterioration of working conditions and labor-management relations, they seem to have done little to contest the situation other than verbally in representative bodies, and this while the models of organizing work are decided by the groups' central managements. Local managers themselves have hardly any

control over the decisions that they are subjected to and forced to apply without any real maneuvering room in negotiating the site-specific modalities of implementation. From this perspective, we can better understand why union action focuses on the repressive aspect of the implementation of lean, as unionists have more resources at their disposal to contest them: it is possible to seek legal redress and to challenge the labor inspectorate, which is not as possible for other aspects of these work reorganizations.

Similarly, the weak union mobilization during negotiations on job arduousness revealed the unions' difficulties faced with the proliferation of themes requiring negotiation. Particularly strong in France, the decentralization of collective bargaining has effectively resulted in a considerable increase in the number of negotiations organized in companies. We observe in this situation that unionists invest differently and selectively in negotiations (Bloch-London and Pélisse, 2008) according to the degree they feel concerned by the topics discussed and/or judge more or less useful to seize upon (Giraud and Ponge, 2016). Unionists did not perceive these negotiations on job arduousness as an opportunity to create a discussion and to mobilize workers regarding work organization; they were seen as technical negotiations that allowed little room to act on the modes of organizing work imposed by the financial logic of the groups, and about which it would be difficult to inspire employees. At FOUNDRY, the leaflet-questionnaires sent out by the CGT Metal Worker's Federation in preparation for these negotiations were not taken out of their boxes in the union's office because "*the last time we distributed a questionnaire, nobody filled it out*". The negotiation was organized at the last minute, was limited to three meetings, and the union representative visibly had no hope in obtaining anything from the process: "*they organized them because they're obligated to by law, but that's all. They don't give a damn. They just don't want to pay any fines and that's it. So there's no point to these negotiations, none whatsoever*". Similarly, the unionists at TRANSFORMER refused to enter into negotiations, preferring to let management unilaterally decide on the arduousness compensation measures to which certain employees are subjected. They justified their attitude by accusing management of "locking up" negotiations and making no room for the union perspective. Under these conditions, they preferred to let management take sole responsibility for the decisions made

rather than to enter into formal negotiations that would serve only to legitimate said decisions.

2.2. Reorganizations and the participatory provisions of industrial relations: plural and ambiguous union practices

Beyond negotiation procedures, the unionists at these three establishments made ambivalent use of the tools for employee participation that managements put into place to support the application of lean management. Indeed, they did not use them at all to dispute the implementation of lean nor to support alternative organizational choices. These managerial tools take diverse forms: groups for expression and team meetings, as well as internal newsletters – regularly relaunched at ENGINES between 2007 and 2011 –, open houses, and satisfaction surveys. These tools are most often presented as a way to circumvent union organizations in their role mediating worker demands (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999), but unionists in the cases studied did not perceive them as such. For this reason, they declined to invest energy in denouncing the tools, though they did not necessarily turn a blind eye to them either (Olivesi, 2013).

At FOUNDRY, the union representatives were not very concerned by these participatory management systems, as they did not believe that employee expression groups prompt lasting adherence to the management's requirements from workers:

> "*The guys, they're really involved in the groups – they've played along because it gives them an opportunity to express themselves about their work and because it's gratifying to show off what you know how to do. Because the consultants don't know anything! […] And afterward, when the guys see that it hasn't changed anything – that management continues to say it's not enough, they have to do more, etc.… Well, after a while, they just don't believe in it anymore…*
> **Do these work groups still exist?**
> *Yes, we have team meetings. And it's useful when we've got problems on the line to be able to talk about it. After that, it's mostly useful to the unit leader, who reminds everyone of the goals, that they have to do more and better… But just because he's talking doesn't mean the*

workers listen! (laughs)" (two CGT representatives from FOUNDRY)

At ENGINES, the site's HR director, who arrived in 2007, quickly strengthened her team by recruiting an HR counselor in charge of carrying out an annual satisfaction survey. Presented to the group's American directors as an important steering indicator, the results were summarized by a "rate of engagement" that enabled different sites to be compared. The results at the factory studied were not considered satisfactory, which led to an offensive reinvestment of this managerial tool, according to the CGT representative, as a useful fulcrum for his activist work:

> "*The survey enabled management to know how to position themselves – how to organize production between their various factories: they measure the degree of worker involvement, and take that into account. […] So we worked together with the executives and the supervisors – we all helped each other to explain the survey and what it could bring, keeping in mind that if we had a good survey that year, we would have a better chance at getting the opportunity to do the manufacturing here than if we had a score under 50% [on the survey]. And we got it, which was important. […] The union's call, the biggest part of what we did was to make people understand there was nothing to gain by sniping at the survey. That would only throw a wrench into the works.*"

In exchange for this engagement in the survey, the representative believed that he was able to obtain a more conciliatory attitude from the site's management, and claimed a link between the good results and the 4.01% raise "wrested" from management during wage negotiations the following year. The investment in the satisfaction survey served to legitimate both the local executives, in regard to the group's European and American directorate, and the CGT, in regard to seeing certain of its demands met by the local management. The survey was used in a strategic, instrumental manner despite not being considered pertinent to raising workers' expectations. The CGT's other unionists didn't hesitate to deride the survey, whose American vocabulary and style appeared exotic. When it comes to highlighting the problems encountered at work, the union organizes its own tours

of the production lines, which it intensified between 2008 and 2011, in a context of increased tension in social relations at the establishment due to the financial crisis.

2.3. Professional positions and interests in reorganization differentiated among unionists

Yet the persistent obstacles to union appropriation of issues concerning the organization of work as a subject of negotiation and motive for collective mobilization also reflects the unionists' own equivocal relationship to these issues. Indeed, we can draw links between their activist attitudes and their professional positions. At first, the unionists surveyed remained marked by a culture of activism that tends to conceive of job arduousness as an acceptable structural element of labor so long as it is financially compensated (Henry, 2017). From their point of view, the negotiations on job arduousness should, for example, first serve to obtain supplementary financial compensation or early retirement measures for workers in the most arduous positions rather than to return to discussions on the ways of organizing work.

Moreover, these union activists did not phrase things in terms of catastrophe when evoking these new forms of organizing work; which is also the reason why they did not feel the need to collectively mobilize against them. At FOUNDRY, for example, the CHSCT Secretary and all union members of his generation – workers with specialized expertise that is rare on the local labor market – knew how to rely on their professional resources to preserve margins of autonomy in the exercise of their professional activity: "*For old hands like us, they come in with lean and it gets under our skin, but not too much, because we send them packing*". The director of HR admitted that this sometimes made it difficult for him to sanction workers he recognized as "*true professionals*" whose experience is indispensable for the factory to run smoothly. While the CHSCT Secretary may have appreciated that young employees are more exposed to hierarchical pressure, he nevertheless seemed to rely more on his personal resources to resist new hierarchical injunctions than on the activation of his union's collective resources. The response from the management union representative (CFE-CGC [French Confederation of Management-General Confederation of Executives]) at the same

factory offers another illustration of how the specific professional situation that union representatives occupy in the factory can shed light on the ambiguous attitude that they adopt regarding this new model of work organization. Admittedly, "*we in the unions aren't too keen on lean,*" said the CFE-CFC representative at FOUNDRY. But:

> "*behind it, theoretically, is an improvement in productivity that should be invisible, or nearly, for us operators, since we work on our working methods, not just 'I work faster and you run'. Now, McKinsey limited losses of time – I'm not speaking as a union representative when I talk about it, but some of it is worth keeping. There are actually some good things that have been put into place. […] So here, union-wise, we haven't pushed hard against lean*."

At ENGINES, the CGT delegate considered that the reorganizations had reduced job arduousness. He even evoked the image of "Club Med" to characterize the working conditions in the factory when asked about the negotiations on job arduousness, relativizing their interest and necessity. In view of his professional career – as a worker in other "much rougher" factories, but also as one promoted to lower management (supervisor in charge of good work practices included in the 5S method) – this unionist minimized the arduousness linked to the work reorganizations. He insisted that security – a major performance and communications goal promoted by the multinational – was much better ensured than before and congratulated himself on the decrease in work-related accidents in the factory, emphasizing his commitment to enforcing safety rules and to dealing with alcohol problems in the workshops. Indeed, he referred to himself as having "*already dealt with a certain number of people who already had very serious files*" in this matter. The fact of taking this position may be connected to his personal career experience, but it may also have to do with the stance that he sought to take as a unionist. According to him, putting emphasis on the issue of security, in all its forms, lent him a professional legitimacy and union recognition from the director of HR, which in turn enabled him to make demands with regard to other matters, such as wages or qualifications. Taking up the traditional CGT unionist demand of protection from work

tools, he insisted that he only defends workers with "*no shit on them*" – that is, those who are "*true professionals*".

This position, shared by the most senior CGT unionists, is not the consensus, however. Other, younger unionists, like the FO delegate or even others within the CGT section, were much more critical, denouncing a formalization of work that multiplies the possibilities and practices of systematic sanctions in cases of deviation from the rules. Thus, the experience of reorganizations is not homogeneous among unionists, but depends upon their position and professional history. It appears that the directorates take this into account in their strategies, using reorganizations to place unionists in either peripheral or better protected positions. As such, the unionists are themselves caught up in the tensions that plague the workforce and have difficulty building a consensus to then mobilize.

Similarly, at FOUNDRY, tensions were visible between older and younger union activists. The latter criticized the former for not being "aggressive" enough and for not seeking to mobilize workers more when, for example, management announced its desire to sell the factory in the summer of 2013. It is as if, in their eyes, their union leaders, who are often close to retirement, had given up, no longer looking to the future and thus not working toward the creation of conditions for stronger labor mobilization. They lamented that the union delegate and the CHSCT Secretary kept them removed from the job arduousness negotiations, in which they wanted to be involved. They thus bemoaned a sort of paralysis of union action created by union leaders pulling back to strategies of individual rather than collective self-defense against the power of the hierarchy.

In these factories, the generational conflict that appears to pit union representatives and younger employees against one another actually reflects positional effects in the organization of work (Flamant, 2005). The reorganization of work to lean production pushed management to place older workers in peripheral positions (order intake, transportation of pieces, etc.), away from production lines, where the work is more intense and more tightly controlled. Most of the CGT union leaders hold such positions. As such, being closer to the "offices", the CGT delegate at ENGINES sought to unionize the employees, technicians, and even supervisors. The local union thus cut itself

off from a portion of the younger workers, who criticized it for being out of touch with certain problems – especially those conflicts linked to the reinforcement of control and the new role of the *petits chefs*. Consequently, some younger workers increasingly turned to the FO delegate, who was initially rather isolated when appointed in 2010, but has since succeeded to unionize a few workers following a walkout over conflicts with the *petits chefs*. The FO delegate, a young man who displays traits that the younger workers identify with (look, use of language, critical and very distant relationship to the hierarchy and even to the work itself), gained the majority in 2014. This reconfiguration amidst the unions has definite effects on collective action: the union front finds itself relatively fragmented and its modes of action (opposition to the authority of management, legitimacy of verbal violence, recourse to demonstrative actions, etc.) have become the subject of internal conflicts.

Conclusion

The fact that the reorganizations initiated in the three factories studied did not provoke union mobilizations does not imply that these new managerial methods were instituted without resistance. Continuing previous research conducted in other organizational and national contexts (Machin, Wood, 2005), this study of three French factories in the industrial sector shows that the new means of organizing work and employee expression have nether disarmed union action and critique, nor produced docile workers who adhere to management discourse. Likewise, despite the development of collective bargaining, the managements of these three establishments have not succeeded in fully enlisting their union interlocutors in these projects to reorganize. Yet, in none of three cases studied did the union critique of these new modes of organizing work lead to the coordination of a collective action to oppose their implementation. In a context of great uncertainty regarding the future of these establishments, union critique does not exclude forms of limited but real cooperation in carrying out these "modernizations". This dual development of unionists' critical appropriation of and adaptation to the new organizational context in these industrial firms actually reflects the divisions that manifest within work collectives faced with managerial work organization practices. This justifies the interest of an attentive approach to the professional and activist dispositions of unionists

in order to comprehend their individual relationships to the issues and still contentious impacts of work organization as well as their persistent difficulties to organize resistance in a more collective manner.

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