

## **‘Sustainable Development and Information Technology’**

### **Interview with Marcel Grignard, Deputy General Secretary of the CFDT**

*Marcel Grignard led the CFDT delegation at the Copenhagen summit on climate change. We interviewed him in that capacity about the links between information technology and sustainable development, the theme of the next issue of the review 'Terminal'.<sup>1</sup> [A1].*

#### *1. How does the CFDT assess the outcome of the Copenhagen Accord?*

Off the cuff, the first feeling is that it's a failure, experienced as such by our teams. According to the UN statement of March 31 on the so-called Copenhagen Accord, a total of 75 countries, representing more than 80 % of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, have made commitments to reduce the growth of these gases by the beginning of 2020. In addition, 111 countries as well as the European Union have indicated that they 'support the Accords', as was pointed out by the office of the UN Convention for climate change. As a whole, these commitments were recognized, especially those made by the biggest polluters on the planet. However, for the first time the UN has published an official document summarizing them, even though they are not legally binding under international law.

According to the final draft, 'not more than 2 degrees' is the target set for this century, thus showing that the theory of global warming is accepted by most of these countries. Although the references were not the same for the Kyoto Protocol and the UN Convention for climate change, the achievements on January 31 2010 of fixed targets for greenhouse gas reductions are insufficient.

So for the CFDT, we're still very wide of the mark: We should have had figures for commitments for the EU. Staying on course for a '2 degree rise' means cutting greenhouse gases by 4 for the developed countries and by 2 for developing countries by 2050. Today, according to Jean Jouzel, we are already heading for a '3 degree rise'. In the current economic crisis, the other concern is about the financing, particularly for developing countries.

On the other hand, the commitment to fight deforestation for its impact on the climate, but also for the loss of biodiversity is positive. There too, despite the support of the wealthy countries, we are having a lot of difficulty finding financing.

The failure of Copenhagen has left Europe without a voice. Taking advantage of the international deadlock, the climate change skeptics are re-launching their unproven theories about global warming coming from solar activity, not human activity. The economic crisis is relegating the subject of the climate change to a distant horizon. The need for action is therefore less urgent in people's minds. This way, the failure of the carbon tax satisfies many lobbies without overly worrying most of the citizens.

#### *2. The 16<sup>th</sup> United Nations Conference on the climate will take place at the beginning of December in Mexico. What are the main goals of the European roadmap?*

Mexico cannot be another Copenhagen. As an intermediary conference, it must define a rigorous methodology to come up with enforceable agreements and a World Organisation for the Environment with powers to sanction in the case of missed targets. A sort of WTO for the environment.

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<sup>1</sup> The original version of this interview will be available on the Terminal review web site, dedicated to social science studies in Information Technologies (<http://www.revue-terminal.org/>).

*3. The 438 articles of the 'Grenelle 2' law passed at the end of June should allow implementation of the main focal points legislated in the 'Grenelle1' law for the environment. Have the CFDT's proposals been adopted?*

Under pressure from certain lobbies, the government left out some key elements of the Grenelle law for the environment. This amounts to a virtual abandoning of the carbon tax, the postponement of the Km tax on heavy vehicles, the postponement of pesticides reduction plan, the non-adaptation of procedures for the development of wind turbines, shortcomings in social and environmental responsibility of companies, etc.

Despite this, the CFDT will closely follow the implementation of the laws, especially the unrolling of the measures on a territorial scale: The devil could be in the detail of the 190 Acts coming up!

To adopt an ecological tax system which is socially equitable and dynamise our industrial policies on the strength of a big loan, there is much left to do, notably in the energy, transport and agriculture sectors, by coordinating as best we can with our European partners.

*4. After the French government's u-turn on the carbon tax, what are the possible solutions that promote a less carbon-based economy?*

We must act on a European level now and seriously consider an adjustment tax at European borders in the absence of an international accord.

In the meantime, with other European countries, France should set up auctions for emissions licenses and a tax to fight against emissions while being careful not to aggravate energy prices and further penalise those who work odd hours or who have been forced by property prices to move far from their work. The redistribution of the sums collected from households must be fair and not favour the well off urban areas, for certain beneficiaries of tax shelters!!!

*5. One of the 'Grenelle 2' measures will see €800m invested on developing new public transport lines [bus lanes, trolley bus and tram lines], by 2012. Is this enough to make an impact in our metropolises?*

*According to the ADEME [Agence de l'Environnement et de la Maîtrise de l'Energie], 2.3 million workers who use their vehicles to get to work have an annual expense of over €6,000. Is it possible to cut this cost?*

Without underestimating the errors of the past (unbridled town planning, resulting in urban sprawl which is ill-suited to the fight against global warming), the plan doesn't go far enough. Unregulated property prices are largely responsible for this situation, along with the permanent discourse calling for a France of home owners. Unlike our European neighbours, French people have a strong preference for detached housing. Nevertheless we have to densify our housing, avoiding, of course, the errors of the town planning of the 60s. Also, for those people who have access problems due to where they live, we should start serious negotiations with businesses about car-pooling, for example, by text messaging, and transport vouchers.

*6. In 2009, the Secretary of State for Transport unveiled a public spending plan to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by more than 2 million tons by 2020, by bringing to 25% the use of alternatives to road transport for merchandise. In 2010 the SNCF freight plan forecasts a 60% reduction in "single carriage" activity. What are your thoughts on this?*

The Freight plan, now adopted by SNCF, is ambitious but abandoning the collection of single carriages is contradictory to the Grenelle talks. We must both re-establish the collection of these single carriages and restore secondary rail lines which have been left in disuse. This is the only way we will successfully fight against greenhouse gases. After public debate on the subject, high speed rail lines are a good thing, but will never be a complete solution for merchandise.

In order to reduce road transport of merchandise, let's bring the places of distribution closer to the places of consumption. The concept of hypermarkets is old-fashioned. Let's bring back local shops and develop railway stations in town centres. Monoprix is starting to change its mode of distribution, but other big names are avoiding paying for warehouses near consumers. Mired in the latest logic and cost analysis, they use their latest logistical platforms to build rolling stocks in trucks, at the price of choking the European road networks and wasting fossil fuels which spew out 300,000 extra tons of CO<sub>2</sub> every year.

*7. Do the changes in production introduced by information technology under the cover of sustainable development seem compatible with the employment policies and concept of work that you defend?*

Telecommuting, which is encouraged by Europe, is not used enough in France. It should be developed to play its full part in the fight against global warming. However, this form of work should be negotiated to avoid shattering the collectivity of work, which is necessary for the individual and for economic efficiency. A lot of meetings could go through videoconferencing, but only after human contact, which alone can resituate a virtual exchange into a collective setting. We will be careful not to establish a disembodied society.

*8. In a 2004 report on the outsourcing of manual labour industries, the CFDT called for labeling respecting social and environmental norms applicable in the customer catchment area. Workers from the manufacturing sector and employees from the service sector are no longer the only ones concerned. Today technician and management jobs or services with high added value are also affected. What conclusions do you draw from this outsourcing?*

For the CFDT, the outsourcing of skills must be done rigorously on the social level. It means implanting high technology industries in emerging countries to conquer emerging markets; we can't be against it. If it is about an actual relocation, we will fight against it, notably on a level of compensation for the employees concerned. The proposition of the Social Label is a response, but we need a European policy to put it in place, in the manner of the European border tax for products not covered by an international agreement aimed at cutting CO<sub>2</sub> levels.

We must therefore avoid the rise of nationalism in Europe and build real European industrial policies. The concept of national champion does not seem to be adapted to the challenges set by globalization.

*9. The CFDT says that France doesn't need another EPR [3G Nuclear Reactor] before 2020. What will your priorities be for solving energy issues within a framework of sustainable development? Instead of focusing on renewable energies, wouldn't it be better to curb demand?*

France suffers from advanced consumption provoked by the social order. Nuclear power is a basic power source, ill-adapted to peaks in consumption. What's more, the question of nuclear waste is still not settled, whether it be highly or weakly radioactive. This option does not fit with the choices made at the Grenelle talks for the Environment: At the level of production, we should diversify our energy mix and reach 23% renewable energy in 2020.

For the CFDT, the main priority is to get energy consumption under control. We have to de-couple growth in GDP with growth in energy use to get to a lower consumption per GDP point than the current level. Let the government regulate the prices, discriminating between industrial use and domestic use to improve our energy efficiency in favour of sustainable growth. The technology of so-called 'smart-meters' is one of the tools used towards this end. Their use should help to reach this objective, along with energy saving equipment and insulation methods.

On your last question, I think the best field for experimenting is construction: We could at the same time fight against energy waste and reduce the differences between households. Let's first concentrate our efforts to save energy on public housing.

*10. What roles do you give information technology in the field of sustainable development?*

Progress is once again ambivalent: We must do a complete analysis of product lifecycles, including the recycling of machines used in a central or decentralised way before we can say.

Far away from the user, large servers are big consumers of energy: According to the daily 'Le Monde', 'an average-sized "data center" uses as much energy as a town of 35,000 people'. The social networking site Facebook has made a deal with PacificCorp, an energy supplier which uses coal power stations!

Data centers such as Google and Yahoo should start using renewable energies. There is also a lot that can be looked at with firms like Microsoft or Apple.

*11. Can 'green' information technology help restore work value in our economy?*

Combined with the consequences of a production-based economy on the environment, the financial crisis of 2008 lead us to affirm that we are in a global crisis of society. We are moving towards new growth including the use of new technologies, but which in themselves solve nothing. Giving work meaning again means giving importance to the human and social dimension. By backing the dedication and responsibility of its employees, our economy can find a new competitiveness. This comes through serious negotiations with all stakeholders and by compromises balanced between social, environmental and economic concerns. Leaving the logic of confrontation behind to be able to cooperate, without excluding the possibility of conflicts, sums up the challenge we face.

*Interview edited by Jean -Pierre Bompard and Dominique Desbois, translated by Tom de Sousa.*

