

The Growth of the Non-Institutional Response in the Canadian Industrial Sector

La contestation dans les relations du travail au Canada

Maxwell Flood

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article veut être une tentative d'explication des grèves sauvages dans l'industrie manufacturière au Canada. L'auteur assimile ces grèves aux phénomènes de plus en plus nombreux qui consistent dans un processus par lequel des personnes, encadrées dans une institution qui leur devient de plus en plus insupportable, la rejettent et recourent aux moyens du bord pour changer la situation.

En ce sens, la grève sauvage serait la réaction spontanée et inorganisée des travailleurs contre les organisations syndicales institutionnalisées. Depuis que les syndicats se sont donnés des structures, qu'ils ont mis au point des mécanismes pour résoudre les problèmes professionnels, sociaux et économiques des travailleurs, qu'ils sont devenus de vastes organisations, est-ce qu'on n'assisterait pas à la croissance des grèves sauvages ? Est-ce que, avec le temps, les organisations syndicales n'auraient pas perdu le sens des intérêts les plus importants de certains groupes de leurs membres, d'où la naissance de conflits résultant d'appréciations diverses des fins recherchées : responsabilité et militantisme, buts éloignés et buts immédiats ? Est-ce que le syndicalisme ne se serait pas trop bureaucraté à mesure qu'il croissait ?

Mais une première question se pose : quelle est l'importance des grèves sauvages au Canada ? Il n'y a pas de statistiques sur le nombre des grèves sauvages au Canada. Pour essayer de les découvrir, il faut procéder par voie de déduction. La première caractéristique d'une grève sauvage, c'est qu'on peut la considérer de courte durée. Les grèves de courte durée (cinq jours ou moins) ont subi au Canada une courbe ascendante marquée de 1956 à 1966, puis elles ont beaucoup diminué par la suite pour faire un nouveau bond en 1969. Mais on ne peut affirmer que toutes les grèves de courte durée sont des grèves sauvages. Comme autre caractéristique, on pourrait soumettre que les grèves sauvages se produisent en cours de convention. Mais, encore là, il est certain que toutes ces grèves ne sont pas des grèves sauvages.

À défaut de renseignements satisfaisants, force est donc de se rabattre sur une analyse sociologique. Sur ce point, l'auteur estime que la grève sauvage ressemble à d'autres phénomènes de même nature qui se présentent dans d'autres secteurs de la société par le rejet des canaux normaux et institutionnels pour la solution de problèmes collectifs.

The Growth of the Non-Institutional Response in the Canadian Industrial Sector

Maxwell Flood

In this paper, the author focuses on analyzing and explaining the widespread emergence of « non-institutional response ».

One of the most difficult problems facing sociologists in the present decade is that of analyzing and explaining the widespread emergence of a phenomenon that we shall call the « non-institutional response. »¹ This concept is defined here as *that process whereby persons, who are members of larger social systems or organizations, resort to non-institutional means in attempts to change aspects of their organizational or social environment.* Where channels and procedures already exist for the induction of orderly changes in social relations, the emergence of the non-institutional response constitutes a challenge to existing power structures, wherever it emerges, in that it not only calls for changes in social relations or objective environmental conditions but, by its very emergence, challenges the legitimacy of existing procedures and the authority relations upon which they are founded. The ultimate non-institutional response in the political sector, for example, would involve the revolutionary rejection of the total system and the replacement of one ruling elite by another.

The concept of non-institutional response is related to the wider

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¹ This paper is based upon material from : FLOOD, Maxwell, *The Wildcat Strike : Non-Institutional Response in the Industrial Sector*, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Michigan State University, 1971.

concept of social change. It is specifically related to the question of the *means* used in the process. For example, revolutionary socialism and revolutionary communism may be regarded as ideologies that are founded upon similar conceptions of the nature of man, the « evils » of capitalism, and the need for a more equitable distribution of resources ; but they are fundamentally dissimilar with respect to the means that they advocate to achieve their objectives. Whereas, the socialist system chooses to work for change within the fabric of the existing structure, the communist system tends to advocate employment of the ultimate non-institutional response — the revolutionary overthrow of the existing power structure. However, once the communist regime is established, further utilisation of the non-institutional response is not likely to be tolerated. In this respect the communist power structure is the same as all others in that it correctly interprets the emergence of a non-institutional response as a challenge to its legitimacy.

The non-institutional response poses a problem in any system in which it emerges on the basis of its challenge to the legitimacy of the existing power structure. For example, in the so-called democratic systems, social conflict can be tolerated so long as it proceeds along institutional channels. Disagreements can, in the final analysis be reduced to a difference of opinions. These can be debated and fought over without threat to the overall structure of the system. The emergence of non-institutional behavior, on the other hand, constitutes a threat to the normative system out of which it emerges.

In recent years, the non-institutional response has become an ubiquitous phenomenon. It has emerged in the universities and ghettos of the United States, the colleges and factories of Europe, the political systems of some Eastern-bloc countries, and, in its ultimate form, in the social systems of some new African nations. In some of the newer systems, its emergence can be explained by the fact that channels of social change have never been developed, or have been inadequately developed. In such cases, the response may be met by the creation or elaboration of adequate channels. In other instances, the non-institutional response seeks the creation of new status relationships between members and authority structures. This is particularly the case in the United States where both Negro and student groups no longer appear willing to accept the traditional status relationships conferred on them by their respective authority-status systems. In such cases, the creation of new status relationships involves not only basic changes in normative structure but also the development of effective channels to cope with continuing social change.

In many of these areas and sectors, the emergence of the non-institutional response can be explained by the historical absence or inadequacies of channels for social change. This absence, of course, has to be explained at the more fundamental level on the basis of a lack of prior effective value confrontation.

THE INDUSTRIAL CASE

This has not been the case in the industrial sector where, after a period of non-institutional response in the thirties, labor unions did secure recognition and did develop elaborate institutional mechanisms to cope with problems arising in the industrial relationship. The processes of collective bargaining and grievance procedures might have been expected to cope with both intermittent economic problems and emergent social problems within the industrial sector. If existing structures are regarded as adequate we are faced with the problem of explaining the persistence and possible growth, in some industrial systems, of the incidence of the non-institutional response by groups of workers. The major form that the non-institutional response takes in the industrial sector is the wildcat strike. In this connection, the kinds of empirical questions that emerge are of the following order :

1. Why, despite the availability of elaborate institutional mechanisms, do groups of workers produce a non-institutional response as they attempt to cope with situations that they define as problems ?
2. Why do groups of workers reject the union, their legitimate spokesman and change agent, as they seek to solve problems arising in the employee-management relationship ?
3. Is the non-institutional behavior a response to the concrete working environment, the industrial structure, the union-organizational structure, or a displaced response to factors in the wider social system ?

Wildcat strikes occur within the context of elaborate mechanisms for coping with change and this fact presents both a perplexing industrial problem and a significant sociological challenge. Their sociological significance stems from the fact that they constitute one category of the more general phenomenon of the non-institutional response. They also present the challenge of explaining the problem of the persistence of the non-institutional response in the apparent presence of elaborate channels for social change. One is forced to consider that the channels for social

change may be more apparent than real. The question is raised of whether the existence of elaborate formal channels for change are defined as effective from the point of view of various segments and levels of the organization. There is also the wider question of the possible development, over time, of cleavage between the needs of particular units of a large-scale organization and the needs of the organization itself. This is not to suggest that an organization *per se* actually acquires needs, but it is conceivable that those who occupy the directional roles in an organization may make choices that they define as being in the best interests of the overall organization which do not meet the needs of particular segments of the organization's constituency. It is in these terms that conflict may arise within a union organization on such issues as : responsibility v. militancy ; long-term goals v. short-term goals ; or broad organizational goals for the total membership v. special needs for particular segments of the membership. The resort to the non-institutional response by union members may be explained in terms of these kinds of cleavage between the organization and segments of the membership.

Other factors to be considered include the fact that while many labor organizations began their careers as social movements, their growth and development, over the years, has tended to follow the pattern of other large-scale organizations. This raises the question of the possible growth of bureaucratization to the point that it renders the organization non-responsive to some of the needs of its membership. Some wildcat strikes may be explained as a non-institutional response by a group of members to such bureaucratization. In such a case, the wildcat strike may actually constitute the development of an incipient social movement within the organization or a segment of it. Here, the outcome may be a measure of revitalization of the organization, or alternatively, the crushing of the incipient social movement.

It is also possible that a union may become subject to administrative constraints, emanating from the wider political system, to such a degree that it is unable to exercise the degree of militancy that the membership demand in the pursuit of their goals. In such a situation, a group of members may utilise the non-institutional response to overcome the lack of independence being enjoyed by their institutional agent.

THE PROBLEM OF INCIDENCE

The incidence rates of wildcat strikes cannot be established directly because of the difficulties of identification. A strike cannot be identified

clearly as a wildcat other than by empirical investigation. Even where a strike is claimed to be a wildcat by union leaders, empirical study of the situation is necessary to insure that it is a genuine and not a pseudo-wildcat.² It is not surprising that government agencies responsible for the collection of strike statistics make not attempt to collect and report the incidence rates of wildcat strikes. As a result of this it is impossible to obtain plots of the incidence of wildcat strikes within particular industrial systems, over time, in any direct fashion.

Some attempts have been made to establish the incidence rates of wildcat strikes by inference. For example, Kuhn has taken the position that existing government statistics in the United States may be used to produce the *relative* incidence of wildcat strikes if one makes the assumption that such strikes are characteristically of short duration.³ The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics does provide information on work stoppages arising out of labor-management disputes, involving six or more workers, and continuing for a full day or shift, through three full days.

The Canadian Department of Labour does not provide a completely equivalent categorization but they do provide statistics on work stoppages which last for a period of under five days. There are some problems with making inferences on the incidence of wildcat from these data. In the first place, not all wildcat strikes are of less than five days' duration. Secondly, not all strikes that are of less than five days' duration are wildcat strikes. However, if the assumption is accepted that wildcat strikes are characteristically of short duration then we can speak in relative and approximate terms of the incidence of wildcats over time.

Table I brings the appropriate statistics together. This suggests that the number of short-term strikes in Canada increased at a moderate rate through the years of 1956 to 1964. It also indicates that in the year 1964-65 there was quite a sharp increase in the number of such strikes, followed by a sharp increase again the following year. Although there was a sharp increase in 1966, this only constituted a very small increase (0.3%) as a percentage of total strikes in the country. This is merely an indication of the fact that there was a sharp increase in strikes of all kinds during that year. The incidence of short-term strikes declined somewhat in 1967 and again in 1968 but gathered strength again in 1969.

² A pseudo-wildcat is defined as one which is covertly sponsored or promoted by union officers.

³ KUHN, J.W., *Bargaining in Grievance Settlement*, Columbia University Press, 1961, pp. 53-55.

TABLE I

NUMBER OF WORK STOPPAGES OF SHORT DURATION, (UNDER 5 DAYS) 1956-1969
AND NUMBER OF WORKERS INVOLVED

| Year | <i>Strikes & Lockouts</i> | | <i>Workers Involved</i> | |
|------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Per Cent of Total</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Per cent of Total</i> |
| 1956 | 91 | 40.0 | 40,984 | 46.2 |
| 1957 | 109 | 45.4 | 40,337 | 47.8 |
| 1958 | 106 | 42.9 | 26,627 | 24.9 |
| 1959 | 95 | 44.8 | 35,781 | 36.7 |
| 1960 | 126 | 48.6 | 17,945 | 37.4 |
| 1961 | 130 | 49.0 | 38,337 | 40.6 |
| 1962 | 145 | 48.8 | 35,123 | 48.7 |
| 1963 | 147 | 46.5 | 39,494 | 47.3 |
| 1964 | 159 | 49.7 | 39,289 | 41.6 |
| 1965 | 226 | 48.6 | 64,646 | 38.5 |
| 1966 | 289 | 48.9 | 138,833 | 34.2 |
| 1967 | 204 | 41.0 | 112,300 | 45.8 |
| 1968 | 174 | 31.6 | 51,477 | 23.3 |
| 1969 | 202 | 36.2 | 114,877 | 38.0 |

SOURCE: Queen's Printer, Ottawa. *Strikes and Lockouts in Canada*, for each year 1956 through 1966 and information supplied by Canada Department of Labour for other years.

An alternative approach to making assessments of the approximate incidence of wildcat strikes within a system is to trace the incidence of strikes on the basis of the contract status of the parties at the time of their origination. If we are prepared to make the assumption that the vast majority of wildcat strikes occur during the contract term, then we have statistics available for making this kind of estimate. The deficiencies of this approach are that not all wildcat strikes occur during the contract period and not all strikes that do occur during the contract period are genuine wildcats. However, this does provide us with another basis for making an approximate assessment of relative incidence.

Table II shows this trend for the Canadian system. These data show the incidence increasing sharply from 1964 to 1966, with a very sharp increase in 1966, with something of a decline in later years, although it should be noted that the duration in man-days was again relatively high in 1969.

TABLE II
 STRIKES AND LOCKOUTS IN CANADA 1956 - 1969 OCCURRING DURING
 THE TERM OF THE CONTRACT

| <i>Year</i> | <i>No. of Strikes</i> | <i>Workers Involved</i> | <i>Duration in Man-Days</i> |
|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1956 | 81 | 29,638 | 110,525 |
| 1957 | 82 | 33,508 | 139,926 |
| 1958 | 62 | 20,690 | 62,170 |
| 1959 | 55 | 15,894 | 37,960 |
| 1960 | 81 | 16,045 | 59,200 |
| 1961 | 65 | 15,253 | 37,850 |
| 1962 | 72 | 16,234 | 58,340 |
| 1963 | 79 | 28,427 | 58,610 |
| 1964 | 111 | 18,945 | 181,760 |
| 1965 | 132 | 37,443 | 121,610 |
| 1966 | 213 | 68,721 | 281,420 |
| 1967 | 160 | 95,466 | 180,930 |
| 1968 | 124 | 32,183 | 102,190 |
| 1969 | 139 | 53,726 | 224,480 |

SOURCE: Queen's Printer, Ottawa. *Strikes and Lockouts in Canada*, for each year 1956 through 1966 and information supplied by Canada Department of Labour for other years.

A much greater degree of accuracy could be obtained by using the combined criteria of strikes that were of short duration *and* occurred during the term of the contract but this information is not available.

From a sociological point of view these approaches to the production of patterns of incidence, over time, are very unsatisfactory. Since these estimates are related to the total Canadian system, we can only make inferences with respect to the total system. That is, we are directed to consider variables at the level of the total society such as societal economic fluctuations and the like. This, however, might not be the kind of variable that is operating. To make meaningful sociological analysis of the overall incidence of wildcat strikes we could require to have information on the relationship of the wildcats to a great many other variables, such as: industrial location, regional location, union involved, rates of technological innovation in the affected industries, and so on. Since these are not available, no sociological analysis can be made by operating at the level of estimated incidence for the total system.

This throws us back to a position where we are required to approach the problem on the basis of particular cases. Nevertheless, the data does indicate that the incidence of the phenomenon of the short-term strike (and, by inference, the wildcat) has been growing in Canada in recent years.

REPORT OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

A recent study by the author was concerned with an investigation of the nature of the wildcat strike phenomenon. Concern in the area first emerged out of the belief that the incidence of wildcat strikes was increasing. A concern with the growth in incidence directed attention to the more fundamental question of cause. A review of the literature clearly indicated that the phenomenon had been woefully neglected by sociologists. Predictably, economists had decided that wildcat strikes were caused by economic factors and industrial relationists had decided that they were similar to a whole range of other pressure tactics that workers used against management.

A sociological approach to the problem was clearly called for and, in the sociological tradition, an effort had to be made to establish how this particular phenomenon was related to others at the more general level. This led to recognition of the fact that, in essence, the wildcat strike was similar to a range of other phenomena in other sectors of society. All of these had one thing in common: the rejection of institutional channels for the solution of collective problems. The concept of the non-institutional response was developed as a general concept covering all situations in which groups resorted to non-institutional means to attempt to solve their problems. Within this context, the wildcat strike may be regarded as non-institutional response in the industrial sector. This presented a particularly interesting problem in that in the industrial sector complex channels apparently existed for the solution of problems and yet wildcat continued to occur.

It was recognized, from consideration of the literature, that a satisfactory definition of the phenomenon had not yet been generated. Certainly, none of the variety of definitions came close to an adequate sociological definition. In pursuit of this task, it became clear that the wildcat strike belonged within the collective behavior perspective and, therefore, any adequate definition would have to take this into account. Following a review of prior attempts, and the specification of the necessary elements of an adequate sociological definition, such a definition, incorporating the collective behavior perspective, was generated.

The next task that was confronted was the paradoxical one of distinction and synthesis. This involved consideration of a scheme that would make meaningful distinctions between different types of wildcat strikes and yet incorporate all possible types within its rubric. To this end a typology was generated.

After considerable thought, and a measure of prompting, it was realized that a wildcat strike always involves an element of union « failure ». This led to an examination of the various functions that a union fulfills as a basis for identification of the potential *loci* of union failure which might constitute the prerequisite for the occurrence of a wildcat strike. A general discussion, in these terms produced a number of hypotheses that stand in need of empirical testing.

Two cases of wildcat strikes were studied in great detail and the events described and analyzed in terms of part of Smelser's theory of collective behavior. This scheme, modified to make distinctions between different types of structural strain, and combined with the concept of primary direction of hostility, proved to be a very useful tool for the analysis of the phenomenon.

The two empirical cases studied proved to be two of the major types of wildcats generated in the typological scheme. The Lake Steel wildcat was found to be explicable in terms of the political situation within the union.⁴ Thus, it was an industrial wildcat, against the union, with the major sources of strain in the situation located within the union itself. The Northern Mining wildcat, on the other hand, was an industrial wildcat, against the company, with the major sources of strain located within the company.⁵

It has to be recognized that the findings of this study were limited by a number of circumstances. First, a single union, and a single set of national officers, were involved in both wildcats ; second, both wildcats occurred at the same temporal point of the contractual relationship ; third, both cases involved local unions with unusually large memberships (over 10,000). All of these circumstances may be said to limit the degree to which the findings may be generalized. The other side of this coin, thought, is that the degree of commonality in the circumstances of the two situations enhanced the reliability of common findings. While one strike was directed against the union and the other against the company, a number of common

⁴ FLOOD, Maxwell, *Wildcat Strike in Lake City*. Information Canada, 1970.

⁵ FLOOD, Maxwell, *The Wildcat Strike*, *op. cit.*

problems and strains were found existing in these locals. For example, both cases showed evidence of serious communication problems between the officers and their membership. Both showed an approach to the negotiation process that can only be described as « secret bargaining » that gave rise, in both instances, to the generation of ambiguity and rumour — two factors closely associated with the susceptibility of persons to accept generalized beliefs. Both cases exhibited a virtual breakdown of the grievance procedure through the application of unenlightened company policies and the failure of the unions, in both cases, to cope with this company strategy. And, probably, most important of all, both unions exhibited considerable factionalization. The degree of factionalization observed in these cases was rather severe and would suggest that very large local unions are liable to factionalization and a struggle for power that, in some circumstances, will result in factions invoking the non-institutional response. This situation, it would appear, is likely to peak in the advent of the contract negotiation process. This, due to the secret bargaining strategy that is commonly adopted, is the point of maximum ambiguity and provides fertile ground for the organized faction to discredit the incumbent officers by innuendo and other means. There seems to be little need for the degree of secrecy that prevails in these situations — it may be part of the hangover of the early days of the organized labor movement ; one that has outlived its usefulness.

The study can only be regarded as a faltering step toward understanding the phenomenon of the wildcat strike since many empty cells remain in the typology. There is also a need for many more case studies of all types that will deal with the many variables that are in operation in this kind of situation : size of local, type of industry, temporal status of contract, organizational structure, technological status and the like. The factors of the intensity and extensity of particular cases is also a matter that ought to be given future consideration.

Three empirical questions were posed at the outset as typical of the kinds of questions that had to be answered : So far as the two cases studied were concerned answers may now be attempted.

1. Why, despite the availability of elaborate institutional mechanisms, do groups of workers produce a non-institutional response as they attempt to cope with situations that they define as problems ?

In the Lake Steel case, the workers were faced with the problem that they felt that their officers could not be trusted to maximize the contract negotiations on their behalf. This belief was generated and spread

by persons who had interests other than the contract on their minds. The union officers failed to convey the status of the negotiations to the membership. This led to the growth of ambiguity and strain ; a condition that was utilized by the factions. The factions defined the solution as a wildcat strike that would indicate to the officers the militancy of the membership and encourage them to maximize the negotiation process.

In the Northern Mining case, the workers were faced with the problem that they felt that their officers had no way to cope with the company's strategy of stalling the negotiation process until the winter months. They felt that the Provincial labor law would permit the company to pursue its objective. On the basis of bitter experience, informal leaders and factions spread the belief that the only way to cope with the situation was to wildcat as soon as the existing contract ran out.

2. Why do groups of workers reject the union their legitimate spokesman and change agent, as they seek to solve problems arising in the employee-management relationship ?

In the Lake Steel case, the workers rejected the union because they were convinced that it was under the domination of the national and international office and, from an earlier experience, they felt that there was a strong possibility that their position would not be maximized at the bargaining table. There was also a widespread view that the union had a bad record with respect to the grievance procedure where they had allowed the company to apply a legalistic approach which stifled the whole procedure.

In the Northern Mining case, the workers did not reject the union. They simply defined the situation as one in which the union was unable to act due to the possibility of legal sanctions being applied to them if they engaged in an illegal strike. Recognizing this fact, they did not reject the union but acted outside of the formal organization in a way that would not have repercussions for the union or its officers.

3. Is the non-institutional behavior a response to the concrete working environment, the industrial structure, the union-organizational structure, or a displaced response to factors in the wider social system ?

In any given case, participants could be found who were responding on the basis of any one, or any combination, of all of the above factors. However, to answer this question what should be determined is the predominant motivational source of the collective action. In the Lake Steel case, the motivation of the factions was in terms of the union-organiza-

tional structure, while that of most of the workers was in terms of the concrete working environment and the desire for an improved contract.

In the Northern Mining case, the motivation was in terms of the concrete working environment and the desire for an improved contract. This was reinforced by the presence of a strong desire for revenge against the company for their behavior in 1958.

It is ironic to note that the British Government at the present time is attempting to legislate wildcat strikes (unauthorized stoppages) out of existence. Perhaps they should examine the fact that, in North America, where the wildcat strike is an illegal act, the phenomenon continues to assert itself, and with increasing incidence in this present decade.

La contestation dans les relations du travail au Canada

Cet article veut être une tentative d'explication des grèves sauvages dans l'industrie manufacturière au Canada. L'auteur assimile ces grèves aux phénomènes de plus en plus nombreux qui consistent dans un processus par lequel des personnes, encadrées dans une institution qui leur devient de plus en plus insupportable, la rejettent et recourent aux moyens du bord pour changer la situation.

En ce sens, la grève sauvage serait la réaction spontanée et inorganisée des travailleurs contre les organisations syndicales institutionnalisées. Depuis que les syndicats se sont donné des structures, qu'ils ont mis au point des mécanismes pour résoudre les problèmes professionnels, sociaux et économiques des travailleurs, qu'ils sont devenus de vastes organisations, est-ce qu'on n'assisterait pas à la croissance des grèves sauvages ? Est-ce que, avec le temps, les organisations syndicales n'auraient pas perdu le sens des intérêts les plus importants de certains groupes de leurs membres, d'où la naissance de conflits résultant d'appréciations diverses des fins recherchées : responsabilité et militantisme, buts éloignés et buts immédiats ? Est-ce que le syndicalisme ne se serait pas trop bureaucratisé à mesure qu'il croissait ?

Mais une première question se pose : quelle est l'importance des grèves sauvages au Canada ? Il n'y a pas de statistiques sur le nombre des grèves sauvages au Canada. Pour essayer de les découvrir, il faut procéder par voie de déduction. La première caractéristique d'une grève sauvage, c'est qu'on peut la considérer de courte durée. Les grèves de courte durée (cinq jours ou moins) ont subi au Canada une courbe ascendante marquée de 1956 à 1966, puis elles ont beaucoup diminué par la suite pour faire un nouveau bond en 1969. Mais on ne peut affirmer que toutes les grèves de courte durée sont des grèves sauvages. Comme autre caractéristique, on pourrait soumettre que les grèves sauvages se produisent en cours de convention. Mais, encore là, il est certain que toutes ces grèves ne sont pas des grèves sauvages.

À défaut de renseignements satisfaisants, force est donc de se rabattre sur une analyse sociologique. Sur ce point, l'auteur estime que la grève sauvage ressemble à d'autres phénomènes de même nature qui se présentent dans d'autres secteurs de la société par le rejet des canaux normaux et institutionnels pour la solution de problèmes collectifs.

En cherchant à cerner ainsi le concept ou le contenu de la grève sauvage, on en arrive vite à la conclusion que l'un de ces éléments est toujours la « faillite » du syndicat. Deux cas de grève sauvage ont été étudiés à Lake Steel et à Northern Mining. Dans le premier cas, elle était faite nettement contre le syndicat ; dans le deuxième cas, elle l'était contre l'entreprise. Dans les deux, on a retrouvé des caractéristiques communes. Il s'agissait notamment de deux syndicats groupant plus de 10,000 membres ; on s'est rendu compte du manque de communication entre les dirigeants et les travailleurs de la base ; on était engagé dans des processus de négociations secrètes ; le mécanisme de règlements des réclamations avait failli à sa tâche ; les syndicats n'avaient pas pu vaincre la stratégie de l'entreprise et, ce qui est encore plus important, dans l'un et l'autre syndicats, il existait des factions qui s'opposaient.

Ceci, évidemment, ne saurait suffire à la compréhension du phénomène et il faudrait sans doute faire l'étude de plusieurs autres cas afin de déceler l'ensemble des causes qui sont responsables des grèves sauvages et les expliquer valablement.

Au fond, comme il a été tenté de le faire dans les deux cas précités, ne faudrait-il pas chercher réponse aux trois questions suivantes.

Pourquoi, même si l'on dispose de mécanismes complexes, les groupes de travailleurs sentent-ils le besoin de réagir spontanément pour faire face à la situation ?

Pourquoi des groupes de travailleurs rejettent-ils le syndicat, les leaders qu'ils se sont donnés, alors qu'ils cherchent à résoudre des problèmes relatifs aux relations professionnelles ?

Ne serait-ce pas là une réaction spontanée au milieu ouvrier ambiant, à l'organisation de l'entreprise, aux structures du syndicalisme ou au système social global ?

Il est amusant de constater que, à l'heure actuelle, le gouvernement britannique tente de légiférer pour mettre un terme aux grèves sauvages, quand, en Amérique du Nord, où la grève sauvage est illégale, le phénomène continue de s'affirmer et prend même plus d'ampleur à mesure que le temps avance.

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