

"Corporatism in the Warehouses"

Wine Wholesalers in Languedoc

1900-1940

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The first half of the XXth century marks for wine-producing Languedoc a period of trouble and disorders. While the effects of the phylloxera¹ crisis are still felt in the turn of the century, the wine-producing world tries to find the maximal extension which was his in the years 1860-70, both in term of production and surface.

While the effects of the phylloxera crisis are fading away and while the vineyard from the Languedoc is reconstituted in the bend of the XXth century, the Midi² plains cover themselves with new vines which turn the region into an industrious and hyper-productive vine growing area. Carignan and Aramon - both key vines of the reconstruction - or hybrid vines commit the local producers in an unlimited race for productivity. It is the victory of a "vine growing of mass"³ that sets the region into an excessive production period. Besides, the market is blocked by so-called "artificial" wines which allowed to answer a steady demand the previous decades while the yields were at the lowest.

¹ To replace this study in its context, see R. Phillips *A Short History of Wine*, Harper Collins 2000 in English or Gavignaud-Fontaine G., *Le Languedoc viticole, la Méditerranée et l'Europe au siècle dernier (XX^e)*, Montpellier, UPV, 2006

² Name given to the Southern Region of France

³ Galtier G., *Le vignoble du Languedoc méditerranéen et du Roussillon, étude comparative d'un vignoble de masse*, Montpellier, 1960, 3 vol

So, at the beginning of the century, the market is disrupted by the presence of defrauded wines and artificial wines and by the raid of wines stemming from these new vineyards with high profitability. Languedoc enters then in a cycle of retailing crises of which it will go out really only at the end of 1970s when is set up a qualitative policy on the initiative of the EEC (in particular through a policy of bonuses with qualitative vines). Sensitive to the chances of the macroeconomic situation, to the climatic variations, to the evolutions of the legislation, to the competitive balance of power which are at stake there, the market of regular wines knows, between 1900 and 1940, a particularly irregular dynamics, alternating the short phases of fast prosperity to which are linked longer periods of recessions⁴. In these conditions, the distribution and sale is a central problem for the economic survival of a region which is economically quasi-exclusively bound to the vine growing⁵.

In this context of crisis, the wine wholesalers from the Languedoc - Or the "Trade" as we call it in the region - strive to limit the disastrous effects of a situation which they can only undergo. A central and major character of the wine-producing society, the wholesaler is the intermediary between the world of the production and the public retailing. Necessary and essential cog in the flow of stocks, it assumes, by its pivotal position, a crucial role on markets. In this period of generalized crisis, its effort of domination of the market of wines in Languedoc is even more marked because it tries to limit at most the sudden irregularities, to assert itself in front of producers better and better organized and to assure at the same time the structuring but also the fluidity of the market.

And so, during these few years, while the wine economy is affected by numerous jolts, the Trade defines its hegemonic temptation by the power of its corporation, the imposition of normative practices and the rigorous control of the market of wines. From 1900, the date of the creation of the regional Syndicate to the year 1940 which upsets the economic conditions of the whole country, in a corporatist logic of protection of its interests, the Trade sets up different logics of defense with uneven but certain effects. It is these strategies and their impacts on the market of wines that will analyze this presentation.

⁴ Lachiver M., *Vins, vignes et vignerons*, Paris, Fayard, 1988

⁵ Dugrand R., *Villes et campagnes en Bas-Languedoc*, Paris, PUF, 1963

I. Strategies of conquest: the control of the wine market

In a context tensed by the irregularity of markets but also by the presence of new and better equipped actors⁶, the regional trade sets up various corporatist strategies of defense of its interests. But beyond this defensive tactics, it also gets organized around ambitious objectives of conquest.

A. The appropriation of prestigious and high-duty positions

The first objective of the regional trade is to master the instruments of control of the economic competences. In a hegemonic logic, the wholesalers dash into the conquest of prestigious but also fundamental positions for the economic orientation of the wine market.

First of all, it is the Chambers of commerce which are the target of the appetite of the local trade. In all France, Employers Unions dominate the chambers of commerce, with in particular a power which increased after the law of 1898⁷ and the Midi does not make an exception. Ph. Lacombrade showed that, for period 1870-1939, about 18 % of the members of Chambers of commerce from the Languedoc are wholesalers⁸. In Montpellier and in Sète, figures exceed the 25 %, the proof of a seizure of the decision-making power by the trade which is appropriating the power and the politico-economic territory.

In Béziers, wine heart of the region, the Chair of the Chamber of Commerce is held by an industrialist close to commercial circles, A. Gaillard, between 1912 and 1934. The next Chair who succeeds him, is P. Granaud, a wholesaler, between 1934 and 1939. In Sète, it is Jean Prats, of the powerful house "Cazalis and Prats", who carries out the function during more than 25 years, between 1908 and 1933. Prats, who becomes the president of the National Syndicate of the wine in 1925, is named in 1931 president of the quite recent Xth Economic region, post which succeeds him in 1935, Gustave Malet, himself preside of the Chamber of

⁶ The CGV ("Confédération générale des vignerons" - General confederation of Wine-growers) or the Wine-growers' Cooperative Warehouses

⁷ Chatriot A. et Lemerrier C., « Les corps intermédiaires » in Duclert V. et Prochasson C., *Dictionnaire critique de la République*, 2002, p. 691-698.

⁸ Lacombrade P., « Les Chambres de Commerce du Languedoc face à la question viticole sous la Troisième République » in *Vin et République (1907-2007), Actes du colloque*, L'Harmattan, 2010, p. 114.

Commerce of Montpellier from 1935 until 1941. In Carcassonne, Emile Génie, president of the Syndicate of wines of the city is at the same time a judge then a president of the Commercial court and the member of the Interministerial Committee of the Vine growing. In the department of Aude, A. Pradal succeeds in the 1920s to P. Cassan in the head of the powerful Syndicate of Lézignan-Corbières then to the Chamber of Commerce of Narbonne⁹. Through these personal trajectories we can see the will of the regional trade to padlock the access to the posts which can influence the future of the wine-producing network and as a consequence the regional economy, profoundly dependent on the wine production and on its trade.

The market of wines is also an economic frame in which numerous conflicts occur. So, the trials are legion between traders, wine growers, brokers, service providers (as the representatives or the railroads). To ensure the defense (literally as figuratively) of their interests, the traders also try to obtain responsible jobs in the court authorities. It is the case in the 1920s with G. Malet in Montpellier which is first judge of the Commercial court of Montpellier from 1921 till 1931. If we take as an example the year of 1923 in Montpellier, the president of the commercial court is a trader (E. Leenhardt) and five judges on ten also. In Agde, the figure amounts to two out of three whereas in Béziers, the Capital of the wine, the president is a former trader and four judges on seven are traders. In Sète, the president and five judges on eight are traders.

Finally, the traders also appropriate a last instrument of control that are the Commissions of price listing. These commissions which meet in the region at the end markets are composed only with traders. They refuse to see sitting in the Commission the Producers when these last ones make the request. In 1925, the Chamber of Commerce of Béziers authorizes moreover, by virtue of the law of 1866 which establishes the Commission, the presence of the agricultural organizations that "in an advisory role"¹⁰. It is also an evident will there to control the economic territory from the Languedoc through a central institution in the establishment of the prices and thus an essential instrument in the market of wines.

⁹ Information from *l'Action Méridionale*, from 1924 to 1939 (Archives départementales de l'Hérault (ADH), PAR 502

¹⁰ ADH 8 M 228, *Fonds Chambre de Commerce de Béziers* : Cours du vin, Lettre CCB, 24/01/1925

B. The development of syndicalism

In the meantime is set up the frame of syndicalism. Until 1900, the local syndicates are uncoordinated ones, sometimes even opposed on certain conflicting points. There is at the beginning of the century about a dozen syndicates, essentially located in the area of production-expedition: Carcassonne, Narbonne, Perpignan, Montpellier, Béziers, Sète, Nîmes for the most important, with more limited ones in number and in influence in Lunel, Marseillan, Pézenas.

Syndicates are create with the aim of "representing the general interests of the Trade, everywhere where need will be and to act on its behalf for the care of its collective interests"¹¹. Created for the greater part in the 1880s, they get organized around a Syndical Chamber in the head of which sits a president. In Sète, where the Syndicate is create in 1888, for example, the Syndical Chamber is elected for three years and consists of 12 members, eligible for reelection by two-third every three years. This Syndical Chamber is the government of the Syndicate and it makes the decisions on its behalf. In the head of the Syndicate, we find an elected president, two vice-presidents, a secretary and a treasurer. It gathers every month for ordinary meetings and every year for the General assembly (in March in Sète). On the initiative of the Chamber or twelve members of the Syndicate, extraordinary assemblies can be held. The role of the Syndicate is to defend its members but also the interests of the Trade. It is invested with "any powers to defend by all the licit means the interests of the Trade in front of or against any competent authority, administrative such as customs, the Régie¹², railroad, etc."¹³. So, if a legal action is brought to court in the name of a member, it is made in the interest and in the name of the Syndicate which contributes at the expense of representation but also to the sentences, if any. In case of attribution of damages, the Syndicate keeps 20 % of the sum. To defend the Syndicate and its members, the Syndicate has a counselor. All the regional Syndicates work, more or less, under this shape and in a corporatist logic try to defend the interests of their members (approximately 80 to 90

¹¹ Archives Municipales de Sète (AMS), 7F737, *Statut du Syndicat de Commerce en Gros de Cette*, 1904

¹² The Régie is the other name of the Administration of indirect taxes. It oversees all the transactions and movements of goods – here wines – in the department.

¹³ AMS, 7F737, *Op. Cit.*

members for Sète over the period, there is 100 - 120 in Montpellier and between 50 in 80 in Béziers).

But in front of the disorganization of the market, the local Syndicates decide to unite. So, October 23rd, 1900, P. Bret, the president of the Syndicate of Montpellier receives in the prestigious Hotel of the Metropolis the delegates of the Syndicates of Nîmes, Perpignan, Béziers and Narbonne as well as the numerous members of the Syndicate of Montpellier, while Caffarel of the Syndicate of Sète is present but non-officially¹⁴. J. Génie of Carcassonne is not present but reassures Bret, by telegram, of his support. All the largest syndicates of the region are here, directly or indirectly, represented. In a context of crisis recalled by president Bret in its strater speech, the objective of the Syndicate is clearly expressed: " Fight together the difficulties and the encroachments of the administrations ". For Bret, it is evident that if every Syndicate has to keep its autonomy and its freedom of initiative, it is fundamental to group together to defend common values on the southern and the national markets. The ambition is "to join forces against all which stops the progress and the ease of our transactions". Thus, the purpose is to build a solid and powerful organization, capable of carrying the voice of the Trade to defend its interests and ensure the tranquility of its company. It is thus in the logic of fluidification of the commercial activities that this new organization has been given birth.

So, Bret continues by stigmatizing the laws "inequitable and inequitable which paralyze us". The purpose is clear, the enemy is identified: the State and its by-products: the Régie and the Customs. Moreover, from this first speech, Bret advances the abuses of the State control and the harassments which it imposes to the wholesalers. And to make a success, it is not only necessary, according to Bret to protest or to speak out but it is, above all, necessary to act, where from the necessity of a union and the implementation of an action of lobbying with the local and national public authorities. To insist indeed on the necessity of grouping together, Bret ends his speech with a letter which he sent to Millerand, then Minister of Trade, and stayed unanswered. And he ends on his conviction of a bigger efficiency and so, a bigger respect for the interests of the Trade, if the grouping is voted. Following some exchanges, the statuses are unanimously adopted. Thus, in the middle of 1920s, while the

¹⁴ Archives municipales de Montpellier (AMM), NC, *Syndicat des vins de Montpellier*, Procès-Verbal de la réunion du 23/10/1900

regional Syndicate became the Southern Federation of the Wholesale trade of Wines and Spirit, the Syndicate includes the Syndicates of Béziers, Carcassonne, Sète, Lézignan, Lunel, Montpellier, Nîmes and Perpignan, the eight largest Syndicates of the region. All in all, in the middle of 1920s, about 650 members give to it a considerable strength and weight¹⁵.

II. An efficient and targeted propaganda

In the optics of a strengthening of its weight and its presence on the market of wines and in the sector in general, the Trade elaborates a speech which aims above all at defending its interests and at legitimizing its action. The purpose is double: to offer a bigger visibility to a slandered profession and make sure the control of the wine market.

A. A multidimensional message

The message aims, first of all, at the defense of the commercial interests of the Trade: limitation of the administrative harassments, the reduction of taxes and expenses which burden the transactions.

The question of the limitation of the expenditure is a recurring question in the debate which is established within labor unions. In May, 1904, during the meeting of the Syndical chamber of Sète, it is stated that the wholesalers are facing "the fatal tendency of the regime to require more and more heavy sacrifices (...) which strike heavily the Trade and specially the Trade of drinks "¹⁶. It is necessary to notice here that expenditure pressure on the traders are very heavy: franchise tax to set up a business, License for the detention of drinks, taxes on circulation, Octroi¹⁷ in the cities which are provided with it, professional taxes, general taxes. Moreover, is added the action of the "Administration of the indirect taxes" which verifies in the quality and the quantity of the goods held, received and sent by the Trade. Besides the regular and sometimes binding control (it is necessary to declare, for every transaction, the

¹⁵ ADH, Annuaire départemental, 1925

¹⁶ AMS, 7F727, *Op. cit.*

¹⁷ Commercial boundaries in the cities. You had to pay a tax to get through them in. They are progressively suppressed from late XIXth Century to early XXth

expeditions and the receptions), the State control can intervene by surprise, in case of suspicion or of denunciation, what is, generally very badly experienced by the traders.

So, in 1912, the Syndicate is becoming concerned by the condemnation of a trader from Montpellier for "Watering"¹⁸. While very clearly the investigations showed that it was the producer who was responsible for the fraud, the Magistrates' court convicted the trader for the reason that he was the only signatory of the receipt. It is for the Trade a judgment which risks "to deteriorate terribly our situation "¹⁹. Criticism against the civil or penal jurisdictions are recurring as in 1913 when E. Leenhardt criticizes the decisions "which surprise and amaze by the ignorance of the particular conditions of certain deals". Leenhardt proposes that the Syndicate of Montpellier is named as expert for the information to be supplied²⁰. In 1924, in a letter sent to the regional newspapers (L'Eclair, Le Petit Méridional and la Dépêche), G. Malet, then president of the Syndicate, complains about a stand offered by these newspapers to Mr Ravel, the President of the Federation of the Wine-growers' Cooperative Warehouse, who attacked the wholesalers²¹. Ravel considers the traders as "parasites living to the detriment of the producers and consumers ". Here, the corporatist defense aims at protecting and redeeming the image and the legitimacy of the traders, often questioned by the producers, in a context of crisis and hyper-competition. Malet also blame the Wine-growers' Cooperative Warehouse for benefiting from grants and from fiscal exemptions which discriminate the Trade and because owing to the Wine-growers' Cooperative Warehouse actions, the wholesalers are now excluded of distribution networks²². Proof that this theme is a recurring theme, the terms - from a side as the other one - are exactly the same in 1939 in an article referring to the comments of E. Orsetti, then president of the regional Syndicate. In December, 1931, always in the same logic, it is question of the sales representatives (which quickly develop in the bend of the 1930s) and of their welfare. The traders hope that the vagueness of the law voted in 1928 and modified in 1930 will not be made in their disfavor and will not add additional expenditure.

¹⁸ Adding illegally water to the wines in order to get more quantity

¹⁹ ADH PAR 2043, *Bulletin Mensuel* (BM), n°60-61, dec-janv 1913

²⁰ BM, feb-mar 1913

²¹ BM, sept 1924

²² Which is really abusive and excessive for the period

Finally, the traders keep throughout period this priority objective which is the control of the market. As soon as 1900, it is P. Bret who considers necessary to "increase the opportunities of our Trade". This is confirmed by the numerous demands uttered this day by the present Syndicates, in particular those aiming at the obstacles made for the circulation of wines. That's why the companies of railroads are a privileged target from 1900. Indeed, the wine from the Languedoc is quasi-exclusively sent by railway, except for rare exceptions (Canal du Midi but in sharp drop or automobile transports which develop but remain still minority especially for the distances exceeding 200 km). To facilitate the expeditions, the demands are numerous and varied: Abolition of the rights of Octroi, obligation for the rail companies to inform the addressees, the revision of the rates of the carriers, the preferential prices for complete trains as done in other sectors, etc. But the control issue is also dealt through the question of quality. In 1900, P. Bret evokes the question to make " appreciate the real wine of France "²³, while at the end of period, the Trade subscribes to the comment of deputy Barthe²⁴ which underlines that "the production should rather have by its side a prosperous Trade directed to the defense of quality wines "²⁵. In this particular case, the Syndicate authorities always defended the necessary quality of wines, that it is the natural quality of the wine through the control and fights of the frauds (sugaring, watering, alcoholisation) or the gustative quality of wines, in particular after 1920.

B. Some effective tools

To make its message go through, the Trade has effective tools allowing it to connect with a public of specialists but also, at the same time, from 1920s, in a desire of an extended control, the whole population from the Languedoc.

The main propaganda instruments are the various publications stemming from the world of commerce. So, in a profoundly disturbed context and a wine landscape profoundly

²³ AMM, NC, *Op. Cit*

²⁴ Bagnol J.-M., 2011. *Le midi viticole au parlement : Edouard Barthe et les députés du vin de l'Hérault (années 1920-1930)*, Montpellier, PULM

²⁵ *L'Action Méridionale* (AM), August 1939

remodeled in 1907²⁶, the regional Syndicate decides to publish a bulletin of connection, the Monthly Bulletin. Its real name is the Monthly Bulletin of the Syndicate of the wholesale Trade of Wines and Spirit of Montpellier and the Syndicates affiliated to the Regional Syndicate of the Midi. It shows here the initiative and effort of the powerful Syndicate from Montpellier which gives birth to this instrument of connection and propaganda in October, 1907. The objective of the Bulletin is simple: make the voice of the Trade carried out, legitimize its action and spread publically its decisions. It is important all the more as the Trade was one of the targets of the movements of the spring, 1907 and of the parliamentary debates which accompanied them²⁷. Besides, the wine growers are meeting in a powerful organization, the CGV²⁸ and it is necessary, even if, at first, the traders are associated to it, not to leave too much space to this new body.

From the first number, the Trade justifies its action through an entitled circular "The question of wines" which legitimizes the activities of the wholesalers who are "provided with beautiful reserves of diverse natural wines, chosen among the best (...) to whom it is up to correct the defects by looking for the mixture of natural wines, giving a perfect body and a modest price"²⁹. Beyond this propagandist and very justifiable effort in a corporatist publication, the Bulletin aims at propagating the official speech of the syndical institution through well targeted axes of defense such as the promotion of the natural wine, the regulation of transport (routing and expeditions), the role of the other economic actors of the wine network (brokers, landlords). The Bulletin also aims at a better knowledge of the wine-producing techniques and happens the echo of the oenological conferences or the technical improvements³⁰. It spreads also widely the orders of justice, what is important for a period (1900-1920) when the jurisprudence shapes the market of wines and while the legislation hardens. Finally, he proposes to its members classified ads, in particular concerning phytosanitary products, wine making process, services of sales representatives or different business affairs.

²⁶ In 1907, a huge crisis stroke the region, leading hundreds of thousands of wine-growers to protest in the biggest cities of the region, eventually giving ways to new reforms

²⁷ Wholesalers are often referred to scientists and fraud makers– which is largely incorrect

²⁸ Gavignaud-Fontaine G., « Aux origines de la CGV dans le Midi : combats pour la défense du vin naturel et la maîtrise des marchés des vins », *Etudes héraultaises*, 2007-2008, n° 37-38, p. 141-154

²⁹ BM n°1, oct 1907

³⁰ BM, jan 1910, « Résumé des conférences pratiques d'œnologie pratique de M. Guiraud »

In a logic of development and broader influence, the Southern Federation decides to change the format of its publication. It explains its initiative in the last number of the Bulletin in September, 1924. It is then decided to transform the Bulletin into " a real newspaper (...) because the creation of a powerful corporate organ was imposed upon the Southern Federation ". Besides, this new format will allow to suit "in the importance of our grouping [and] in the extension for which it is justifiable to hope"³¹. Now a public and official organ, *l'Action Méridionale* becomes then voice of the Federation and the tone is there different. Appearing semimonthly, on four pages (eight in rare exceptions - Congresses or extraordinary laws), it is naturally sent to all the members but is also available in cafés and kiosks of the region. It is also sent to all the members of Parliament of the wine departments. Naturally, we find articles connected to the news (The "wine-producing Chronicle" section) and to the commercial interests but also the reports of the markets of the region, the prices of wines, reports of union meetings ("The federal life") as well as more non-specialized articles linked to the wine civilization. The tone is there voluntary polemical, so much in the titles ("For our good wines", "Controversy", "An adjustment", "Economic at first!", " Illicit Speculation") that in the themes treated. These last ones often catch up with the usual themes of corporatist defense: legitimization of the activity, the free-enterprise, the ease of the Trade, the tax relief, the control of the market. We also find there articles dealing with major fiscal reforms or legislative ones as in 1928 about the reform on "the tax on the sales" the title of which blocks the headlines on 5 columns³² or in 1930 when the "Parliamentary Commission on the causes of the crisis" visits the region³³. Nonetheless, a new axis is defined, that of the propaganda for the promotion of wines from the Languedoc through the question of the exports and the participations in the Exhibitions and the others competitions. Finally, we find also numerous advertisements there and announces, proof of the wide distribution of the newspaper.

³¹ BM, sept 1924

³² AM, 31/12/1928

³³ AM, 01/03/1930

III. The impacts of a well-planned process

Thanks to strategies which show to be particularly effective, the traders are capable, in the bend of the 1920s, to position as an indispensable actor of the market of wines and especially as a dominant actor. It becomes a reality of two manners: by the audience which it experiences and by the imposition of normative practices on the market.

A. A respected and privileged interlocutor

The Trade through his leading position in the consular authorities or thanks to the action and to the activity of its Syndicates becomes little by little a privileged interlocutor. First of all, it is in constant connection with the State either through the members of Parliament, or through the Ministers. The contacts between the Trade and the representatives of the State are then consistent and through numerous channels. It is the case in particular regarding railroads. So, ten years after the letter presented by P. Bret whom Millerand has never answered, the same Millerand is coming to Montpellier. Become Minister of the Public works, he is contacted by the Syndicate of Montpellier and he agrees to receive them in January, 1910 in order to hear their complaints. Eleven months later, he answers, in a letter to these complaints concerning the dysfunctions of the train station of Montpellier. But, following an investigation of his services, he does not see the necessity of giving a favorable recommendation to the requests of the trade (loading of Tanker-Wagons, excessive rates, thefts of wine). In front of this refusal, the Syndicate sends a new letter which, eventually, conducts to certain changes a few months later like the improvement of the platforms or the limitation of price rates. It's a first victory for the Syndicate but it's not enough since the Syndicate from Béziers engaged the same procedure and was proved right in the enlargement of the station³⁴. At the end of 1911, the Syndicate from Montpellier pressures the station of Montpellier for the delays which continue to accumulate in spite of the observations of the Minister³⁵. Same thing with the thefts which raise in 1913. Eventually, in June, 1913, after a visit of E. Leenhardt, president of the Syndicate from Montpellier, with the Stationmaster, the

³⁴ BM, dec 1910

³⁵ BM oct 1911

situation seems to improve, both as for the question of the saturation and congestion or the thefts. Nevertheless, in September, a new controversy arises, regarding large delays, between the station of Montpellier and the Syndicate which decides then to appeal to the Chamber of Commerce to solve the problem. At the end of September, the engineer of the company who manages the station (PLM³⁶) commits himself to the fact that works of enlargement are soon undertaken³⁷. In 1914, it is through the members of Parliament as Aldy, a deputy of the Aude, that the Trade pressed the government so that this one in his turn intervenes with rail companies, in particular in the optics of a bigger fluidity in the expeditions³⁸. Time as we can see is very important issue for the wholesalers and always in the midst of negotiations between authorities, Syndicates and train companies. After the war, the contacts are also many, mainly reports on the rates of transportation, like the ones presented by A. Gaillard in the 1920s for the Chamber of Commerce of Beziers³⁹ or in some articles of *l'Action Méridionale*.

In the 1930s, a new turn is taken and the message is now oriented over the purification of the market, disrupted essentially by Algerian wines and bad wines. So, in a report presented in front of the Chamber of Commerce of Béziers in April, 1932 and sent to the members of Parliament of the region as well as to Ministers of Trade and the Industry, to the State Minister of the Education and to the other Chambers of commerce of the Midi, Bastide d'Izard, which is an influential wholesaler from Béziers, presents its solutions to cleanse the market, in particular the compulsory distillation and the quota system⁴⁰. This approach joins in logic of a demand which peak is the coming in the region of the Parliamentary committee charged with investigating into the wine crisis in 1931⁴¹. During the hearings which are held in Montpellier, to Béziers, in Perpignan, in Carcassonne in February, 1930 and in Nîmes in June, 1931, the representatives of the Trade are heard every time, sometimes even several times for H. Campanaud then President of the Southern Federation and G. Malet, honorary president of the Federation. The voice of the trade is then listened to, as much as that of the Production,

³⁶ Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée, the most powerful company of the area connecting Paris to the South of France

³⁷ BM, June and October 1913

³⁸ BM, Sept 1914

³⁹ ADH, 8 M 308, *Chambre de commerce de Béziers*, Transports des vins, 1919-1921

⁴⁰ ADH 8 M 231, *Chambre de Commerce de Béziers*, Commissions des Vins

⁴¹ Archives de l'Assemblée Nationale, *Rapport fait au nom de la Commission des boissons chargée de procéder à une enquête sur la situation de la viticulture de France et d'Algérie*, Paris, 1930-1931

what is already a victory in itself when we know the balance of power in the 1900s or in the 1910s. Besides, certain points promoted by the trade are adopted by the commission and integrated into the future law, in particular the question of the wine lockers, the quality control or the analysis of wines⁴².

Lastly, the Trade is also in constant dialogue with the Administration (in particular Fraud control and The Régie), what allows to improve the conditions of exercise of the wine companies. So in July, 1912, the President of the Syndicate is notified by the Director of Indirect taxes about certain irregularities committed by the carters who discharge the barrels of wines in front of the station when the station is closed. After a dialogue between the President and the Director, this last one accepts, temporary, the situation. This way, the Syndicate has the time to let know to its members that this practice is forbidden and passable of pursuits. In the 1920s, the various reports of the chambers of commerce where dominate tend themselves to alert the Administration of the necessity of watching the frauds which seem to continue massively in the region. So in a report presented by Gaillard, Oustric and Araou in May, 1929, on the causes of the crisis, wheter natural (regional overproduction and wines of Algeria) or artificial (sugaring and abnormal wines), the Trade asks for the stricter control of the practices of sugaring, for the distillation of abnormal wines and more active surveillance of the movements of wines⁴³.

B. The normalization and the standardization of the market

Beyond the visibility and the respectability which they underlie, all the strategies settled by the Trade aim the imposition of transactional practices on the market of wines.

These practices concern, first of all, the shapes of the deals themselves. In this context, the question of the brokerage is, in this trend of normalization and standardization, a central question. The broker is the one who puts in relation the trader and the wine-grower. It is an important intermediary for wine companies because it is the reliable person who proposes quality wines and who knows well the production - in all its varieties - of a given land. Thus,

⁴² AAN, *Rapport Barthe*, op. cit., T. I, p. 44 et p. 48.

⁴³ ADH 8 M 230, *Chambre de Commerce de Béziers*, Commissions des Vins

the question of the rate of brokerage, which is the remuneration for the brokers, and the one of the respectability of the brokers are recurring subjects in the speech of the traders. For example, in 1909, we learn in the Bulletin that the Syndicate of Montpellier distributed brokers' card by which these last ones make a commitment on several points: to not take out of their role of intermediary, to respect the local uses, to propose the best goods⁴⁴. In exchange, the members of the Syndicate make a commitment to appeal to these very brokers in priority. This safety of the exchanges is essential for the Trade so much that in 1910, an additional step is taken. A draft contract is proposed by which the brokers should sign the slip of sample⁴⁵ and thus to be responsible for sold goods. With this contract, the Trade makes a commitment to pay the brokers at the level of 25 centimes an hectoliter, what is not still the case at the beginning of the century. But the attempt does not finally succeed in front of the refusal of the brokers of a modification of the local uses. On the other hand, the Syndicate from Montpellier plans, in 1911, to edit a "black book"⁴⁶ in which would be registered the incorrect brokers, in particular those who deal directly with the Outside⁴⁷. In the following years, Syndicates try to limit the importance of the brokers-agents who work at the same time as brokers and as commission agents⁴⁸, there also with a sure success, these last ones disappearing more or less except in some places (Olonzac where they reappear at the end of 1930s). Eventually, the issue of the brokers seems settled because, scanning the Bulletin, in 1908-1909, it is discussed in 9 articles while for 1912 and 1913, it concerns only two articles⁴⁹.

It is necessary to wait the 1920s for the question of the brokerage to return. These last ones distinguish themselves in the 1920s by conducting movements of contestation, especially of the rates of brokerage. During the most sharp cases (on 1921 or 1926), it is every time the same pattern. In April, 1926, the brokers dash into a long-term unitarian strike in the course of which they demand a considerable increase of the rate of brokerage⁵⁰. In front of this movement, the traders, little inclined to see a part of their profits flying away, propose an appreciation and in May, the Syndicate of Montpellier is the first one to propose, followed by

⁴⁴ BM, jan 1909

⁴⁵ Before the agreement, the buyer tastes samples which are accompanied with a receipt signed by the seller

⁴⁶ BM, oct 1911

⁴⁷ Outside is the name given to the region where the wines were shipped (Paris, Lyon, East of France)

⁴⁸ The Commission agents are wholesalers with no stock and no warehouses. They are buying in the name of another wholesaler, generally from the Outside. They receive a commission, hence their name.

⁴⁹ BM, Table of contents, 1909 and 1913

⁵⁰ AM, 1/12/1926

the other local syndicates, an increase of the rate of brokerage, now up to 75 centimes an hectoliter. But very quickly, the union representatives of the traders get the situation in hand and near the end of 1926, a project of uniform rules is proposed by the Southern Federation. Fatally, this rule subjects the brokers to the regional Trade through a professional ID card designed by the Southern Federation and at the written commitment not to sell to the traders foreign to the region. From their part, the traders make a commitment to deal only with the brokers owners of this card. Above all, proof of the institutionalization of the commercial circuits, any deal is officialised from now on by a slip on which will be registered all the information relative to the contract, in particular the names of the seller, the buyer and the broker. Finally, in case of dispute, a Chamber of equal arbitration will be gathered to judge⁵¹. Less than twenty years after their first tries, the wholesalers fulfilled their thirst of domination over the brokers.

Lastly, the syndicate effort for a standardization of the qualitative criteria is also important. From 1907, the traders by the voice of their Syndicates or of the Chambers of commerce insist on the qualitative orientation that the market of wines has to set. Thus, the session of June 3rd, 1907, chaired by F. Guy who is of one of the biggest trading families of the city, enumerates the solutions of the wine crisis which affects the region. All are associated to the purification of the sector by pursuing and by fighting more effectively watering, sugaring, the wines of synthesis⁵². Moreover in 1911, during the annual congress, Roussel-Lacombe, then General Secretary of the regional Syndicate rejoices with the creation of the department of the repression of the frauds in 1907⁵³.

In the 1920s and the 1930s, the qualitative argument is in the center of the debate. So, the quality notion is ceaselessly, from the end of 1920s, in the heart of the demands of the Trade to the State. It is a crucial step and a major awareness towards the conceptualization of a quality market of which the traders would be the champions⁵⁴. Above all, all these measures are largely spoken out in the hearings during the visit of the Committee Barthe and they appear mainly in the laws which define from 1931 the wine Status⁵⁵. The traders become

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² ADH 8 M179, PV Chambre de commerce de Béziers sur la crise de 1907

⁵³ BM, May 1911

⁵⁴ AM, 15/08/25, « Nos bons vins »,

⁵⁵ Bagnol J.-M., *Op. cit.*

moreover the first defenders as proven by the numerous reports of the sessions of the Committee of wines of the Chamber of Commerce of Béziers which demands a better control in the execution of the quota systems as well as a fiercer repression of sprains in the status of 1931⁵⁶. It is the proof there, if it was necessary need to underline it, of the undeniable dimension that has taken the Trade of wines, at the same time upstream and downstream to the legislative or administrative decision-making.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that the corporatist effort paid off. Patiently but resolutely, the regional Trade, through the institutions which it dominated or through direct contacts with public authorities applied its program of domination on the wine market. This power which leans on positions of choice in the economic sector of the region, effective propaganda and targeted message is elaborated around recurring themes such as the purge, the normalization and the standardization of the market. Beyond these simple demands, it is the security and tranquility of the transactions that look for the traders, in a paradoxical context where they are legitimized (as profession but also as intermediary bodies) but also questioned by more and more aggressive competitors.

This syndical power becomes a reality in the quantitative weight of the representative authorities (local or regional) but also during public demonstrations as the meeting of protests which regroups thousands of persons in Montpellier on November 30th, 1909⁵⁷ or the corporatist reunion of Lézignan-Corbières in May, 1930⁵⁸ in honor of deputy Léon Castel⁵⁹. Another significant example is when P. Cassan is buried in February, 1935 in Narbonne, Castel, mayor-deputy of the city, Mr Sarraut, the former senator, the whole City Council, the prefect, the president of the Commercial court, the administrator of the Bank of France among others, form a procession which is followed by hundreds of persons and the quasi-totality of the commercial elite of the region⁶⁰.

⁵⁶ ADH, 8 M 231, *Chambre de Commerce de Béziers*, Commissions des Vins, Délibérations sur la crise viticole, 1932-1933

⁵⁷ BM, Nov 1909

⁵⁸ AM 19 May 1930

⁵⁹ The MP who presented the law reforming the professional tax in 1928

⁶⁰ AM, mars 1935

Nevertheless, the period which opens is the one questionings. The wine growers organize Wine-growers' Cooperative Warehouse better and better equipped commercially and which are going to dash, massively, into the trade war. The brokers set up syndical structures which give birth after the war to a powerful national Federation and which brings the brokers out of the submission of the wholesalers. Above all, the Second war discredits the traders who took advantage of the conflict to grow rich and who pay their image of major interlocutor of public authorities. Thus, while is established the golden age of the syndical unionism in the Region, it closes almost so early, plunging the traders into rejection and into the oblivion.