

## **The Experience of a President of Christian Business Executives in France in the Fight Against Corruption (1990-1997)**

I – Facing Corruption in the business life: two cases

II – Facing corruption as an all-day general behaviour  
(short summary of the 7-year experience of fighting corruption  
in the EDC, a manager association in France)

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## **Introduction**

Everybody is in agreement: corruption must be denounced, even if it has become customary in public or private, political, economic or social habits. The capacity of each person to recognise and to speak about it is necessary.

I am now going to tell you a few stories. These are true life experiences: at first, in the business life and secondly, in a manager association where I have been the Chairman of the EDC (formerly CFPC) for four years. And then we will draw a few conclusions.

### **I Facing corruption in the business life: two cases**

#### **a) Misadventure in Asia:**

When this story happened to me, our company, Subrenat, had already been working with Asia for more than 20 years, purchasing raw materials under import quotas.

I was visiting an established supplier in a far part of Asia. After long and tight negotiations with a whole delegation of industrialists and governmental representatives, I returned to my hotel when one of them took me aside. He offered me a specific agreement where I could become a very privileged and sole partner in a private company under his wife's name. As a counterpart and as an expression of his gratitude for my co-operative and understanding behaviour, he would maintain any business agreements and help with the quotas.

The challenge was tough. We had reached an agreement for our contracts, but nothing was written yet. Those contracts were essential for the future of my company. I was alone, no one in France knew exactly where I was in this remote and foreign country. And I had to leave the following morning.

I didn't give an immediate answer and called my wife and my collaborators in the evening to explain the situation. I spent the night building up thousands of assumptions.

And the next morning I met him again in the airport departure lounge. I said NO - he let me go - I rushed into the aircraft... Even today, I am unsure whether he understood me or not.

#### **b) Subsidiary in North Africa:**

Some years ago, we had a subsidiary office in a North African country, that was very small but had authorisation to sell our products, woven and nonwoven fabrics, under the authority of the Customs & Excise.

Our General Manager went one day with our Sales Manager there. When he came back, he said to me: "I think my trip was worth a go ; I hit the jackpot !". In fact he had a meeting with their Minister of Transport.

I asked him: "What is it about ?". He replied: "I can obtain exclusive rights for the importation of brand-new lorries in bond, that would allow us to transport our goods with brand-new, inexpensive lorries at unbeatable

costs.” But what would be the counterpart ? The Minister of Transport would join forces with us. We had to say NO and refused the jackpot.

## **II Facing corruption as an all-day general behaviour (short summary of the 7-year experience of fighting corruption in a manager association)**

### **a) Preparation of the CFPC campaign ; public awareness**

In 1990 during the Bordeaux Congress, a Company head made the following declaration to Roger Fauroux, Minister of Industry: “It is no longer possible to do any work ; contracts in the construction industry are obtained with the help of brown envelopes, backhanders and corruption in general”. The Chairman of the CFPC (Patrons et Dirigeants Chrétiens), Jacques Vial, engaged lengthy discussions with the board. Xavier Bouthillon, Vice-President of the movement, was finally put in charge of launching the campaign.

We were very surprised to establish that corruption was not well known. We drew up several levels of definitions, in accordance with dictionary terms, legal terms and interviews we had with Company heads. After a great deal of questioning, we put forward the following rule: corruption begins from the moment where you can no longer mention it openly or publicly. This rule is not flexible: it applies to small circles and therefore few people, or to wide areas with a large number of people involved.

### **b) The action of the CFPC, based on three objectives and one discipline:**

1. To break the law of silence in order to bring the problem out into the open and thereby overcome the isolation in which economic executives and those confronted with regular or occasional corruption found themselves.
2. To work to promote the dissemination of Christian moral principles in the business world and enlighten consciences.
3. To give a proper legal framework to the financing of political life by Companies and Company heads by establishing a dialogue with public authorities in order to implement new reforms.
4. Discipline consisted in always respecting people everywhere, not taking account of rumours, not denouncing anyone nor contributing to the spread of rumours on any subject.

The initial stage contributed to changing the relationship of force between the corrupter and the person corrupted and put the “blackmailed” Company in the position of being able to say No.

### **c) Its progress ; signature of a Manifesto**

In March 1992, an initial assessment of the efforts accomplished was made during the National Congress in Lille. Then the CFPC appealed to other institutions, including the Public Ministry.

In April 1992, the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption was set up by the Prime Minister, Mr Pierre Beregovoy. It was the responsibility of the

Government to remind people of the legislation in this domain, to ensure its application and to pass new laws.

At the end of 1992, public debates were organised on the theme of corruption in 30 towns in France.

In November 1994, the CFPC had 6,500 signed Manifestos.

In 1995, the Commission took part in more than 20 debates or events in schools, both public & private educational establishments and also in the Training Centre of the National Police and the Criminal Investigation Department.

End 1996, strong action was undertaken using the local media. In addition, an international networking relationship was established with the BKU in Germany and the CABE in Great Britain, where similar deliberations had been started.

This campaign was continued up to 1998, a period covering the 4 years of my tenure as the Chairman of the EDC.

## **Conclusion**

We denounce corruption as it undermines the fundamental values on humanity, such as freedom, dignity, justice and solidarity. Its consequences with regard to economic, political, social and cultural matters may be extremely damaging.

It is necessary for each one of us to take note of this evil. We must continue to promote this awareness, and educate, and educate with concrete examples, principles and behaviours. But it is a long path because we can get used to it rapidly.

A campaign of this type imposes dealing with moderation. Even if we should denounce systems or behaviour, a respect for each man, for the whole man and for all men is required. This has been our constant but difficult objective to serve dignity and peace.