

The structure of all the federations is similar. The federations lay down general policy recommendations but in fact have very little power over their constituent bodies. These bodies are the federations, which are national groups representing an industry or group of industries. Each federation is made up of syndicates, which are local unions grouping together the workers of the industry concerned in a given locality. The syndicates are also grouped horizontally in unions locales and unions départementales, which represent all the syndicates affiliated to the confederation in each locality and department respectively.

The majority of workers in private industry are unorganized (the unions are stronger in nationalized industry).

All unions are active in the political sphere. The CGT, of course, is Communist, while the FO is close to the Socialist Party and the CFTC to the Catholic MRP, though neither the latter two is controlled by the party.

One great weakness of all unions is that dues are very low and paid with great irregularity. Also, the concept of membership in a union lacks precision and voting pronoun in shop elections may be considered proof of membership, even though dues are paid seldom or never.

Employers' associations

The Conseil National du Patronat Français (CNPF) is the recognized organization of industrial and commercial employers and represents them in bargaining and with the Government. Most large firms are represented in the CNPF, which is made up of a federation for each important industry or group of industries. There are also some smaller specialized employers' associations, as well as societies generally intended to improve human relations in industry (whose memberships overlap that of the CNPF).

Policies within the CNPF are generally well coordinated. The regional and national federations have considerable control over wages in individual establishments.

Collective bargaining

Collective bargaining is still of limited importance in France. On the one hand, a substantial sector of the economy remains unorganized and the more or less unilateral decision of the employer governs wages and conditions of work there. On the other hand, the state plays a large role. The continual and bitter wranglings among labor groups have made employers unwilling to put much trust in them and the unions, recognizing their own weakness, have often preferred government intervention to really free bargaining. Bargaining is variously conducted at national, regional, and local levels.

In deference to the interests of the smaller labor organizations, the principle of multiunion representation in collective bargaining has long been recognized. This has stimulated interunion rivalry and made more difficult the process of arriving at an agreement.

The fact that the CGT is Communist dominated has led to the introduction of many new and unrelated issues into collective bargaining. Strikes against the Government or against other unions have been common and there has often been little interest on the part of the CGT in an ultimate settlement of differences.

Aside from these union weaknesses, another reason for the poor functioning of collective bargaining is that many employers accept it only as a lesser evil than government control. In general, the employers are better organized than the workers, are more unified, and have more money and information.

In the nationalized industries which are in sectors of the economy that are not competitive with private industry, bargaining has consisted of unions bringing political pressure to bear on the Government in order to alter its decrees. In the competitive sector regular collective bargaining occurs in publicly owned enterprises.

Contracts

National agreements (and in some cases regional and local agreements) must by law contain certain clauses on the exercise of union rights, wages for each labor grade (including differentials for difficult and dangerous work and equal pay for women workers), conditions of engagement and dismissal, shop stewards and works committees, conciliation, etc. Cost-of-living sliding scales are rare, but a number of agreements provide for reopening if prices rise by a specified amount.

Wage contracts are often signed independent of complete collective agreements. Especially in the early years after the war was this so; interest then centered on wages because of the sharp inflation and three times as many wage