Chapter 10

France: Patterns of Interaction

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What does *volatility* do to French voting?
2. Why is the French party system more complex than Britain's party system?
3. How does the French electoral system force parties together?
4. What is *Gaullism*? Is it an ideology or a mood?
5. Why is the French right split into three?
6. Could something like the *Events of May* happen again?
7. How can referendums be misused?
8. How do French labor unions differ from British and U.S. labor unions?
9. How do statism, *dirigisme*, and *tutelle* relate to each other?

Party image and voter identification with parties are less developed in France than in Britain. Many French voters do not have long-term party preferences, and French parties tend to come and go and change their names, blurring their images. One result is that many voters are not attached to one party and shift their votes as a form of protest. In 2002, this inadvertently led to a top contender, Socialist Premier Jospin, getting knocked out of the presidential race by a right-wing extremist. In most of West Europe, elections show only small swings of a few points from the previous contest, but not in France, where new parties can rise and fall within a few years. French parties may gain or lose ten to twenty percentage points from their previous showing. French voting can be **volatile**.

Few French parties have not changed their names at one time or another. The Gaullists especially have changed their name often. From 1947 to 1952 they called themselves the Rally of the French People (RPF). With de Gaulle's coming to power in 1958, they became the Union for the New Republic (UNR), then in 1967 the Democratic Union for the Fifth Republic (UDV^e), in 1968 the Union for the Defense of the Republic (UDR), in 1971 the Union of Democrats for the Republic (with the same initials, UDR), in 1976 the Rally for the Republic (RPR), and in 2002 the Union for a Presidential Majority (UMP), quickly renamed the Union for a Popular Movement (still UMP).

An American would exclaim: "But how can you build party identification with so many changes?" The Gaullists—since 1976 known as the "neo-Gaullists"—saw themselves less as a structured political party than as a mass rally of patriotism. What makes sense in one political culture does not in another. The name changes showed the Gaullists were always starting fresh. Neo-Gaullist Nicolas Sarkozy was elected president in 2007.

The Socialists, founded in 1905, originally called themselves the French Section of the Workers International, or SFIO. In 1969, merging with some smaller left groups, they changed the name to the *Parti Socialiste* (PS). In 1981, the PS under Mitterrand won both the presidency and the National Assembly. It again became the largest party in parliament in 1997 but shrank to second-largest in the 2002 and 2007 elections.

The French center is unusually messy, possibly because many figures strive for prominence and do not like to merge into one party. The Union for French Democracy (*Union pour la Démocratie*

volatile Rises and falls quickly. (See page 133.)

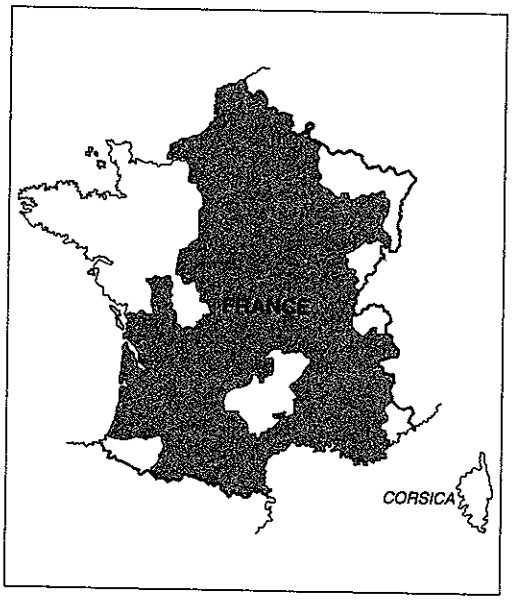
Française, UDF) began as a parliamentary grouping in 1962 and first ran in elections in 1966 as the Republicans. In 1974 its leader, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, was elected president and later merged several small centrist parties with the Republicans to form the UDF, a loose federation of five center-right parties. By 2007, the UDF had split into the New Center (NC) and Democratic Movement (MoDem). The French center, where small parties continually rise, fall, and change names, has been aptly called "the eternal swamp."

One French party does not play around with name changes, the Communists (PCF), although they, too, have trouble with their party's image. The Communists plunged from 25 percent of the parliamentary French vote in 1972 to only 2 percent in 2007. On the other side of the spectrum, the National Front emerged in 1986 as the anti-immigrant party but wins no parliamentary seats. To make things even more confusing, left parties often run jointly as the United Left or Common Program

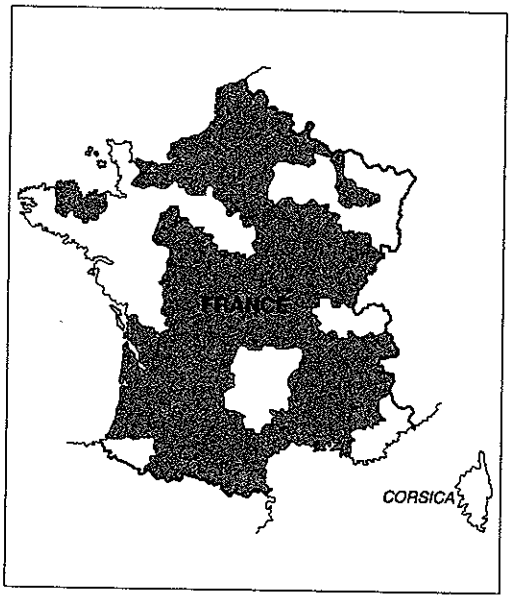
GEOGRAPHY

THE PERSISTENCE OF REGION

In 1936 the leftist Popular Front won in the shaded départements (map, left). In 1981, Socialist François Mitterrand won the presidency with a very similar pattern (map, right). Maps of recent elections look much the same. Region, as well as social class and religion, often produces distinct and durable voting patterns.



1936: POPULAR FRONT VOTE



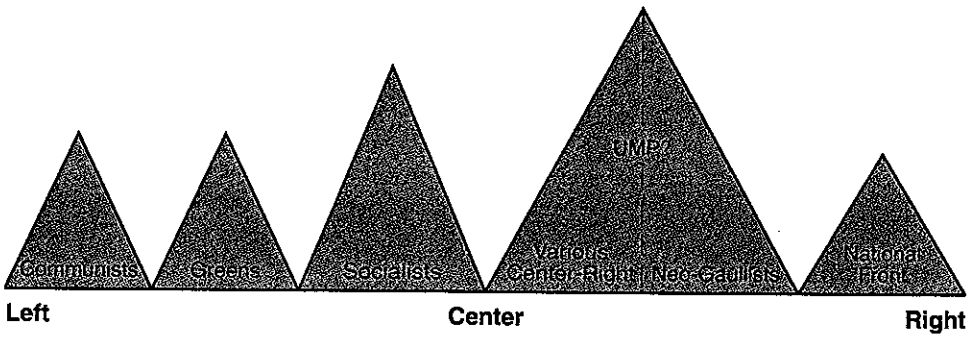
1981: MITTERAND VOTE

(Socialist and Communist), and right parties as the Presidential Majority or Alliance (Gaullists and New Center).

bloc Grouping or alliance of parties.

THE EMERGING PARTY SYSTEM

The French party system is not as complex as it used to be; it is down from ten parties in 1958 to perhaps four relevant ones today. France's parties have been consolidating and forming into two blocs—one left and one right—seemingly headed for a "two-plus" party system. Much depends on whether the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) can unite the French right. Schematically it looks like this:



The two blocs are divided internally. As we shall see, the Communists and other far-left parties are always feuding with the Socialists, and the small centrist parties are constantly trying to eat into the neo-Gaullists. If they can help it, none of the other parties wants anything to do with the racist National Front. In terms of voter appeal, however, the two blocs fit into two great French tendencies of which we spoke earlier. The left favors ways to make people more equal, by taxing the rich, controlling the economy, and providing more welfare benefits. The right also favors change, but based on economic growth and modest reforms. Both look to a strong state, but the left dislikes free-market solutions while Sarkozy claimed to favor some of them. Sarkozy is unlikely to implement a really competitive economy, which the UMP never supported. The National Front wants expulsion of most immigrants and France out of the EU.

THE DEMISE OF THE FRENCH COMMUNISTS

In most countries, Socialist and Communist parties were natural enemies ever since the Communists followed Lenin's command and broke from the Socialists shortly after World War I. Typically, where one was strong the other was weak. Britain, Sweden, Germany, and Spain all had large socialist-type parties and small Communist parties. In Italy, on the other hand, a large Communist party—now renamed the Democratic Party of the Left—overshadowed the Socialists. In France it used to be that way, but during the 1970s and 1980s the Socialists grew and the Communists shrank, so that now the PS is by far the largest left party in France.

Eurocommunism 1970s move by Italian Communists away from Stalinism and toward democracy.

Stalinist Brutal central control over Communist parties.

protest vote Ballot cast against existing regime.

The two parties have common roots. The PCF in 1920 broke away from the Socialists. In a battle that raged over the twentieth century, the Communists claimed that the Socialists were not militant enough, that they abandoned revolutionary Marxism for gradual, pragmatic reformism. The PCF echoed the Soviet line. As was the case worldwide, the Communists did not join in the Resistance until Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941. Since Stalin's death, however, the PCF gradually became more moderate. It denounced the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and claimed to favor **Eurocommunism**. French voters could not trust the Communists, though, for old **Stalinist** tendencies reappeared—as when the party expelled dissenting intellectuals, laid down dogmatic lines, or stabbed fellow leftists in the back.

The result was an unstable alliance of Socialists and Communists. The two parties hated each other but knew they needed each other. The second round, or runoff, of a French election places a great premium on combining parties, for in the French runoff a simple plurality wins. If the Communists and Socialists ran separately on the second ballot they would always lose to the combined Gaullists and other center-right parties. Accordingly, the left parties—the PS, PCF, and now many small leftist parties—generally support the strongest left candidate, regardless of party, on the second ballot. It is the French electoral system that drives rivals on the French left together.

When François Mitterrand took over the shrunken and demoralized Socialist party in 1971, it was overshadowed on the French left by the Communists, who regularly won a fifth of the vote. Given France's peculiar electoral system—single-member districts with runoff—Mitterrand knew the PS could not grow on its own. He also knew that a good third of the Communist vote was not from committed Communists; it was a **protest vote** that could be won over by an attractive Socialist party. He cleverly embraced the Communists, used them, won away their lukewarm supporters, and then discarded the PCF. In 1984 a shrunken, demoralized PCF left the cabinet and has done worse and worse in elections ever since.

The decline of the French Communist party, however, did not solve the problem of the fragmented French left. It may have made it worse, as it spawned several far-left parties trying to grab its militant tradition and worker and intellectual electorate. In the 2007 presidential election, four far-leftist candidates fragmented the left vote. Two Trotskyist parties (Workers Struggle and Revolutionary Communists) together took 5.4 percent of the first-round vote. In France, as in most of Europe, at least a third of the electorate vote for one leftist party or another—ranging from the Socialists at center-left to the Communists at medium-left to far-left Trotskyists—because the issues that inspire the left remain: poverty, inequality, unemployment, and U.S. hegemony. The demise of the French Communists meant the rise of other left parties.

THE FRACTURED RIGHT

As the French left is fragmented, so is the right. France has one large party on the right, but two smaller ones speak to other parts of the electorate. Some trace the division of the French right back to the Revolution, which produced (1) an ultraconservative monarchist right, (2) a moderate Orleanist right, and (3) a populist Napoleonic right. Today, these three strands are represented by the (1) National Front (FN), (2) New Center (NC), and (3) neo-Gaullists. As noted, the NC descended from the old UDF. Further right, outside of the mainstream, the National Front and other small groups spit venom at immigrants and the European Union.

For the right, ideology and doctrine are less important than personality. Gaullists traditionally have been skeptical of European unity and the free market, while most small centrist parties have been for them. But in speaking to the same middle-class electorate, some of these small parties and the Gaullists often cooperate and agree on a single parliamentary candidate on the first ballot. In 2007 the neo-Gaullists attempted a grand merger of parties into the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), but that is difficult because on the right—and this is true of many countries—personality becomes the dominant issue.

Here, the shadow of de Gaulle still looms. The French right is torn between those who want to keep his image alive and those who favor more traditional center-right politics. De Gaulle, a Napoleonic figure above parties, never aimed at founding a political party. Like Franco, Mussolini, and Latin American military dictators, de Gaulle hated parties, blaming their incessant squabbles for all the troubles of the Third and Fourth Republics. De Gaulle did not even much care for the Gaullist party; he never formally headed or endorsed it. His attitude seemed to be: "Alright, if you must, go ahead and worship me." During his long reign (1958–1969), the Gaullist party was simply a tool for his control of the National Assembly. In the legislative elections of 1968, the Gaullists won 46 percent of the popular vote and an outright majority of National Assembly seats.

A single charismatic figure leading a national movement is a tough act to follow. Such a leader does not tolerate other important personalities around him; he prefers obedient servants and yes-men. As a result, when de Gaulle departed in 1969, he left a vacuum that no one in the Gaullist party could fill. His former premier, Georges Pompidou, won the presidency that year, but by the time Pompidou died in 1974, the Republican candidate, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (who later formed the UDF),

Comparison

The Rise of Europe's Angry Right

For some years most European lands have seen the growth of angry rightist parties led by charismatic speakers, such as Le Pen's National Front in France, Jörg Haider's Freedom party in Austria, Pim Fortuyn (assassinated in 2002) in the Netherlands, Germany's National Republicans and Law and Order Offensive, the Flemish Bloc in Belgium, the Danish People's party, and Italy's Northern League and National Alliance. While they differ in many respects, all are anti-immigrant, anti-crime, and anti-EU and can draw one voter in five. Even Japan has an angry, anti-immigrant nationalist as Tokyo's governor.

Some call them fascist, but they deny it and are probably not. Rather, they voice voter concerns that conventional politicians ignored for years. Many Europeans really do not like Muslim immigrants and crime. Nobody ever asked them if they wanted their neighborhoods taken over by foreign cultures. Mainstream politicians have been too politically correct to talk about this. Likewise, European elites have almost reflexively favored the EU even though many ordinary citizens fear the loss of their countries' sovereignty, culture, and jobs in a united Europe (see Chapter 17). Anti-immigrant politicians simply filled the gap left by the conventional politicians. This is also happening inside the U.S. Republican party.

Is this a threat to European democracy, or is it democracy in action? If one party does not give voters what they want, another party will. In any country a certain percentage of disgruntled citizens is receptive to the simplified arguments of populist demagogues. America has its George Wallaces and Ross Perots but also has some advantages: (1) Americans are used to immigrants from all continents; and (2) many of the alienated Americans do not vote. (Perhaps we should be grateful for our low electoral turnout.)

passé Outmoded; receded into the past.

stalemate Politically stuck among competing groups.

was more attractive than the Gaullist candidate. Because de Gaulle disdained parties, he never bothered institutionalizing his movement into a durable party. The real genius in politics is the one who builds lastingly; de Gaulle did not.

Trying to fill the vacuum, Jacques Chirac in 1976 reorganized the moribund Gaullists into the Rally for the Republic, commonly called "neo-Gaullist." A slick performer who alienated many French people by his high-handedness, Chirac alternately quarreled and made up with the UDF. Pushed into a less-active role when he was forced to cohabit with a Socialist cabinet after the 1997 election, Chirac gave up party leadership. Chirac and his party won in 2002 by default because Socialist Jospin was knocked out in the first round by frivolous left voting. The problem for the Gaullists parallels that of the Socialists: What do we stand for now? Most French now consider Gaullism **passé**, a vaguely conservative mood rather than a party.

The Neo-Gaullists show that there are several types of conservatism. When Nicolas Sarkozy was interior minister under President Chirac, he fought with Premier Dominique de Villepin. Both were UMP and conservatives, but Sarkozy was pro-market and pro-United States, while de Villepin wanted to preserve the French welfare state and oppose U.S. power. Sarkozy is a modern, Thatcher-type conservative, de Villepin a traditional French big-government conservative. Conservatism means different things in different countries.

The relationships among the French right parties are similar to those among the French left parties: The electoral system has them compete with each other on the first round but ally on the second round. The difference on the right is that the hatred is largely personal, a struggle between bright, ambitious party leaders who want to be president. If parties merge, it means the leaders of one party become second fiddles, something most politicians dislike. Before you condemn French politicians as unusually petty and jealous, ask yourself if American politicians are much different.

In France, everything fragments. One way to cure electoral fragmentation: Drop the first round of elections and go to straight FPTP, U.S.- and British-style, which would force like-minded parties together. The first round, a kind of primary, may not be necessary. Already the large UMP and Socialists practice a kind of primary election by having on-line votes for nominees.

THE STALEMATE CYCLE

French politics seems to run in a roughly cyclical pattern. "Normal" politics in France usually leads to a **stalemate** in which political groups, constantly feuding among themselves, block major change. This produces crises the stuck system cannot handle, which in turn lead to an explosion every generation or two. To get out of the stalemate, the French have repeatedly turned to a hero, a charismatic figure who has not been sullied by "status quo" politics. French politics seems to require a Napoleon from time to time.

After a dozen years of revolutionary turmoil, France welcomed the first Napoleon as a hero to end the chaos. Half a century later, they turned to Louis Napoleon for the same reason. In 1940 the French parliament actually voted dictatorial powers for the aged Marshal Pétain. Pierre Mendès-France was the thinking-person's hero in 1954 when he got France out of Indochina, but he lacked the charisma of the outsider who is above ordinary politics. That figure arrived in 1958 with de Gaulle, who saved France from civil war over Algeria.

De Gaulle believed he had ended France's recurrent stalemates by constructing a Fifth Republic with a strong president. But did the Fifth Republic really transcend French history? At first it appeared to. France withdrew from the Algerian horror, streamlined its party system, and surged ahead economically. In 1968, however, all hell broke loose (see box on page 139), and people

began to wonder if the Fifth Republic was suffering from some of the same ills that had plagued predecessors.

Mitterrand also discovered that the transformation of French politics was not as complete as de Gaulle believed. De Gaulle's personal popularity ensured not only his election as president but a large Gaullist party in the National Assembly. This made it easy to govern; any law or budget de Gaulle wanted was rubberstamped in the Palais Bourbon. The Fifth Republic did not depend on the unstable coalitions of the Third and Fourth in order to govern. But how much did it depend on the same party maintaining control of both the executive and legislative branches?

Events of May Euphemism for riots and upheaval of May 1968.

CRS Republican Security Companies, French paramilitary police.

France found out in 1986. With the election of a National Assembly dominated by the Republicans and Gaullists, Mitterrand named a conservative as premier but stayed on as president. Cohabitation (see Chapter 8) kept the government functioning, but only because Mitterrand consented to letting Premier Chirac pretty much have his way in naming ministers and pursuing conservative policies. Mitterrand played a waiting game, letting Chirac take the blame for unpopular policies. After some time, when Mitterrand's popularity eclipsed Chirac's, Mitterrand began to oppose some of Chirac's policies. A U.S.-style deadlock emerged as neither the president nor the premier could get his way. Chirac controlled parliament, but Mitterrand could denounce his legislative program and criticize him personally. The second cohabitation period was somewhat more relaxed as Mitterrand, probably aware he was dying, attempted little. In the third cohabitation period, 1997–2002, Chirac named Jospin premier. It worked fairly well, but underneath was a smoldering discontent that gave Le Pen the edge on Jospin in the first round of the 2002 presidential election.

Political Culture

The Events of May 1968

Just ten years after the near civil war over Algeria that brought de Gaulle to power, his regime suffered another explosion, the **Events of May**. A month of student and worker strikes and battles with police revealed that under the law-and-order surface of Gaullist France throbbed the old revolutionary tradition. The great split that had plagued France for generations had not completely healed; the cleavage still ran through French society like a California earthquake fault line, ready to crack open without warning.

Trouble began at the University of Nanterre in a suburb of Paris. Students—fed up with bad facilities and curricula—staged a strike that quickly spread to most universities and many factories. France split again, this time largely on age lines; the young were tired of obeying the old. The **CRS** (*Compagnies Républicains de Sécurité*) waded into protesters with tear gas and truncheons. De Gaulle placed troops and tanks around Paris.

But then the revolution—if that is what it was—burned out, like many previous uprisings in French history. De Gaulle promised more participation and held parliamentary elections in which Gaullists won an actual majority of seats in the National Assembly. "When the French are fearful," noted one French political scientist, "they swing to the right," the tendency in many countries.

Some see recent riots as resurgences of French revolutionary feeling. But 2005 rioting was confined to young Muslim males who were alienated from French society and who had no goals or purposes; some called it simple vandalism. In 2006 students protested against a new employment law. After the 2007 election of Sarkozy, young people rioted and shouted "Sarko fascist!" The commonality of all these: angry young people marginalized by the system.

Referendum Madness

French presidents often use plebiscites or referendums to pose major questions directly to the people without going through elected representatives in parliament. The referendum, almost unknown in Britain, has been used twenty times since 1793 in France. It fits neatly into a very French tradition: Rousseau's idea of the general will. On the surface, nothing could be more democratic than consulting the people directly on their wishes.

In reality, plebiscites can be very tricky, an authoritarian tool that manipulates the citizenry. The key power in a referendum belongs to the one who writes the question. The question can be posed in such a simplified way that one almost has to vote yes. Furthermore, a referendum usually comes after the decision has already been made and the leader just wants popular endorsement.

De Gaulle played the plebiscite game to the hilt. For him, a referendum was not merely to gain mass approval for a given policy but to reinforce his personal rule. After every plebiscite he could turn to his old enemies, the traditional politicians, and say, "You see, the people understand and support me. Who needs you?" In French political theory, again derived from Rousseau, a nation run by a leader who communicates directly with the people—without parties, parliaments, politicians, or interest groups getting in the way—is the ideal democracy. Some, however, see in this model the seeds of dictatorship.

De Gaulle attached his personal prestige to each referendum. "If the nation rejects the measure," he in effect told France, "it also rejects me, and I shall resign." This blunt approach worked every time until the last. In 1958 people were glad to get a new constitution. In 1961 and 1962 they were delighted to see Algeria become independent and French troops come home. But de Gaulle's second referendum of 1962 raised some questions. De Gaulle had made a mistake in the 1958 constitution in having the president chosen by a gigantic electoral college composed of local office holders, whom he assumed would be conservative and pro-de Gaulle; they were not. So in October 1962, bypassing the National Assembly, he asked the voters to amend the constitution to allow direct election of the president. The referendum passed with a 62 percent yes vote, but this represented only 46 percent of the total electorate, far less than de Gaulle expected.

The hint was clear—the French were happy to get out of Algeria but not so happy about tinkering with the constitution—but de Gaulle ignored it. In 1969, after riding out the 1968 Events of May with resounding electoral success, de Gaulle once again sought to demonstrate that the people were behind him. He picked a rather technical issue that did not require a plebiscite: the reform (that is, weakening) of the Senate and the setting up of regional subunits. The French people said no, and true to his word, de Gaulle resigned. He went back to Colombey-les-Deux-Eglises, where he died the following year.

Geography

Sailing the Mediterranean

On your luxury yacht, you are sailing in a great, clockwise circle around the Mediterranean Sea, always keeping the shore a few kilometers to port (left, for you landlubbers). You enter through the Strait of Gibraltar. Which countries do you pass one after another on your left?

Spain, France, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia (minute shoreline), Croatia again, Montenegro, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

Since then, there have been five referendums. In 1972 Pompidou proposed enlarging the Common Market to include Britain, Ireland, and Denmark. Mitterrand's 1988 referendum on granting the Pacific territory of New Caledonia greater independence passed but with only a 37 percent turnout. In 1992, Mitterrand brought the Europe-unifying Maastricht Treaty before the French electorate, which narrowly endorsed it. The 2000 referendum to cut the presidential term to five years had only a 31 percent turnout. The 2005 French referendum to ratify a new EU constitution failed (see Chapter 17), humiliating Chirac. In none of these cases were referendums needed to solve a constitutional problem. Rather, presidents tried to use a referendum to bolster mass support and deflect attention away from more serious matters. Voter apathy and negativity suggest that the French have tired of referendums. (Have Californians?)

Fragmented Labor Unions

In Britain we saw how interest groups were well-organized and powerful, especially big labor and big business. This pattern is true of North Europe in general, as we shall see in Germany. In France, and in Latin Europe in general, there are plenty of interest groups, but they are usually splintered along party lines.

In Britain (and Germany and Sweden), for example, there is one big labor federation. In France (and Italy and Spain) there are several labor unions—Communist, Socialist, Catholic, and independent unions—competing against each other. The Communist-led CGT (*Confédération Generale du Travail*) is considered powerful in France, but on a comparative basis it is weak. Indeed, only 9 percent of the French workforce, mostly in the public sector, is organized into unions; even U.S. unions are proportionally bigger (12 percent of the workforce).

French unions also quarrel among themselves. The CGT has collided angrily with the smaller, Socialist-oriented CFDT (Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail) and nonparty Force Ouvrière. Labor's voice in France is weak and divided. Accordingly, French unions are strong neither in bargaining with management nor in making an impact on government. There are many strikes in France, but they tend to be short because unions lack strike funds. Transportation workers disrupt rail and subway service every few years.

Part of the problem with French unions is their political slant. Since the largest union, the CGT, is led by Communists, the other parties, especially those who control the government, ignore their demands. French unions engage in political strikes, actions aimed at government policy rather than bread-and-butter demands. In the 1980s and 1990s French unions often protested closures or layoffs at state-owned industries, much as in Thatcher's Britain. Few French unions take the American view that a union is a device to negotiate better terms with management, not a political tool.

Latin Europe's Divided Unions

	France	Italy	Spain
Communist	CGT	CGIL	CO
Socialist	CFDT	—	UGT
Catholic	CFTC	CISL	—
Other	FO (centrist)	UIL (soc. dem.)	CNT (anarchist)

Medef French business association.

The relative weakness of French unions has an important side effect: It makes them more, rather than less, militant and ideological. Feeling that the government has turned its back on them, French workers are more bitter than the workers of Germany and Sweden, where strong unions have an important voice in government. In those two countries, large and well-organized unions have become moderate and pragmatic.

Business and the Bureaucracy

French business is perhaps no more influential than labor. The French Enterprise Movement (*Mouvement des Enterprises de France*, **Medef**) seeks reforms to cut taxes, privatize pensions, and free up labor laws. Only business creates jobs, it argues, not government. This Thatcherite view is just catching on in France, but Medef does not have much political access. Unlike Americans, most French people see business as callous, exploitive, and inhumane. Few French politicians are openly pro-business the way American politicians are. It would be bad politics in France.

Mitterrand ignored business interests to pursue a leftist economic program. This worried businesses; they cut investment in France and increased it in the United States. Mitterrand backed off and tried to make peace with French business. Premier and later President Chirac privatized large sections of France's nationalized industries, including a state-owned television network, but never endorsed a free-market society. Socialist Jospin continued privatization but talked about worker rights. Sarkozy talked about "economic patriotism" rather than a free economy.

Medef is not as influential as the CBI in Britain because of the French tendency of individualism. A French firm may belong to Medef but rely only on its own resources for discreet contacts with the bureaucracy. The big advantage business has over labor is that the French business executive and civil servant are the same kind of people, often graduates of the same *grande école*, who move back and forth between top jobs in government and industry. Such connections give France's

Geography

"Every Country Has a South"

This old saw contains much truth. Except for very small countries, the south of most lands in the northern hemisphere is poorer and less developed than the north. Industry has tended to cluster in the north of France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United States. People in the south of these countries are often described as fun-loving but slow and lazy. The northern people are often described as efficient and hard-working. The south usually votes differently from the north. People of the *Midi* describe themselves as a different, Mediterranean race that does not like the cold, germanic northern French.

The picture changes when you go too far north; development in the Scandinavian countries and Russia generally centers on the temperate areas and avoids the frozen north. In the southern hemisphere it is reversed, for there the southerly areas are more temperate. Centuries ago, Montesquieu held that climate produces culture. Why should political and economic growth be closely associated with temperate or even slightly chilly zones?

major firms **structured access** to the machinery of administration, something small-business people, farmers, and labor unionists do not enjoy. This builds up bitterness and frustration in the latter groups that explode from time to time in flash parties such as the National Front, in produce dumping by farmers, and in wildcat strikes. The political-bureaucratic systems of North Europe, by providing access for all major groups, generally avoid such outbursts.

structured access Permanent openness of bureaucracy to interest-group demands.

dirigiste Bureaucrats directing industry; closely connected to French statism.

Grands Corps Top bureaucrats of France.

But neither do French businesspeople dominate government decision making. French political tradition is stacked against it. In the Anglo-American tradition, pluralism—the open interplay of interest groups with government—is respected, sometimes even celebrated. Lobbying by farmers, businesspeople, trade unionists, and ethnic groups in Washington is perfectly normal. In Britain's Commons, "interested members" make no secret that they represent certain industries. French political theory, however, still devoted to Rousseau's notion that interest groups are immoral—because they represent partial wills rather than the general will—tends to view such groups as illegitimate. The French tradition is **dirigiste**, from the top down, ignoring interest-group demands, and doing what civil servants deem best for French power and prestige. This gives great power to bureaucrats.

THE ETERNAL BUREAUCRACY

France has been developing its bureaucracy for five centuries. Almost every change of regime has led to growth in the number (now 5 million) and functions of French bureaucrats. During the revolving-door cabinets of the Fourth Republic, people used to say that the fall of governments did not really matter that much because the bureaucracy ran the country anyway. Tocqueville recognized the problem in 1856, when he complained about France's "regulating, restrictive administration, which seeks to anticipate everything, take charge of everything."

In France, civil servants oversee almost everything in the French economy, all leading to lack of competition. The closest parallel to French bureaucrats are Japanese bureaucrats, who have similar powers and frames of mind. France has several nationalized industries—aircraft, automobiles, coal mines, banks, steel, gas, and electricity—in addition to the areas that are state-run throughout Europe, such as the "PTT" (post, telephone, and telegraph) and the railroads. Workers in these industries are not considered civil servants, but top management people are. Every French teacher, from kindergarten to university, is a civil servant.

The civil servants we are concerned with, however, are the several thousand who staff the Paris ministries, the **Grands Corps**, most of whom are graduates of one of the Great Schools. Even more powerful than their British counterparts, French civil servants of the administrative class (about the top 20 percent) run France. If anything, bureaucratic power grew with the coming of the Fifth Republic, for de Gaulle so hamstrung the National Assembly that it could no longer provide a policy counterweight to, or check on, the actions of the top civil servants. Furthermore, by long French tradition, many top politicians were themselves civil servants, often graduates of the ENA or of another *grande école*. Typically, three-fourths of ministers and two-fifths of National Assembly deputies are civil servants. This close connection leads to government of the bureaucrats, by the bureaucrats, and for the bureaucrats.

This is not to say that French bureaucrats run things badly; often they do their jobs very well. It is the bureaucratic attitude that alienates their countrymen: aloof, arrogant, cold, logical, and

tutelle French for tutelage; bureaucratic guidance.

Inspection Short for General Finance Inspection; very top of French bureaucracy, with powers to investigate all branches.

rigid. It is not that they do not meet and interact with other Frenchmen; civil servants sit on thousands of committees and councils all over the country with representatives of business, labor, and farming. The highest of these is the national Social and Economic Council, but even it has a purely advisory capacity, and often advice is ignored as "unobjective." Its composition is increasingly bureaucratic; some 30 percent of its members are named by the government. The French bureaucratic approach is expressed in their term **tutelle**, for they act more as tutors than as servants of the public.

Many say the real elite running France is the *Inspection Générale de Finance*. Selected from among the top ten ENA graduates (see page 125) each year, the superbright *inspecteurs de finances* snoop all around France to see how public funds are spent. All levels of French government are afraid of them. Few countries have the precise equivalent of the **Inspection**. It would be as if the U.S. Government Accountability Office (formerly the General Accounting Office), a branch of Congress, had the enforcement powers of the FBI. *Inspecteurs* of all ranks and ages agree to always see each other. Inspectors who "put on the slippers" (see box below) still have clout, as they offer each other the best public and private jobs. And if they tire of these, they can return to the IGF at a top salary.

Government by Bureaucracy

More than in Britain, the civil service in France constitutes a powerful governing body uncontrolled by elected officials, who sometimes denounce the bureaucracy as an "administrative labyrinth" or even as "administrative totalitarianism." But they can do little about it.

We should not think France is unique in this regard, for no country has devised a way to keep its bureaucracy under control. France, with a longer history of bureaucratization and the Great Schools' monopoly over the top civil service, merely reveals the pattern more fully. In Japan, it reaches a high point. In trying to reform, trim, or democratize a bureaucracy we run into a problem: Almost any solution we can think of requires adding *more* bureaucrats. In France, for example, Mitterrand once tried a ministry for the reform of administration—still more bureaucracy.

Comparison

"Putting on the Slippers"

The movement of top French civil servants to the executive suites of industries is called *pantouflage,* or "putting on the slippers." Japan has the exact same pattern, called "descent from heaven." In France, a graduate of the *Ecole Polytechnique* or the ENA, after a few years in a Paris ministry, can slip into a cushy, high-paying management job, often in a firm he or she used to deal with as an official. Over half the chief executives of France's largest firms are former high civil servants, and two-thirds are graduates of the ENA or X. *Pantouflage* is an important connecting link between French business and bureaucracy. It also invites corruption, which seems endemic in France. One top French administrator after another gets caught using business connections to supplement their income.

We can see here why the French people, faced with an unresponsive, undemocra cratic maze, turn frustrated and bitter. Where bureaucracy thrives, democracy shrivel to fix this, France's top politicians step into a contradiction. Statism needs lots of bu to run welfare programs, supervise industry, and plan the economy. But privatization means ening bureaucratic controls and letting market forces guide society. Most mainstream French politicians oppose this, for that would mean turning away from what they regard as the humane French model of the welfare state and to a savage "Anglo-Saxon" market system (exception: Sarkozy). Again, France is stuck.

KEY TERMS

bloc (p. 135)
CRS (p. 139)
dirigiste (p. 143)
Eurocommunism (p. 136)
Events of May (p. 139)
Grands Corps (p. 143)
Inspection (p. 144)
Medef (p. 142)
passé (p. 138)
protest vote (p. 136)
stalemate (p. 138)
Stalinist (p. 136)
structured access (p. 143)
tutelle (p. 144)
volatile (p. 134)

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