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ABSTRACT

Between 1903 and 1909 the four Parisian business associations grouping management in the jewellery industry were confronted with intense labour unrest, which at three moments (1903, 1906 and 1907) culminated in massive strikes for a reduction in working hours, organized by labour unions that had joined up with the CGT and believed in the methods of direct action.

Worker's mobilizations succeeded to make numerous employers give up, but employer's business associations maintain however their initial refusal.

In effect, the offers of negotiations which labour organizations were obliged to make were systematically rejected by management. Attempts at mediation by government were no more successful. In effect these refusals went along with the re-affirmation of the notion of bilateral work contracts, and thus the disqualification of professional unions—both those of labour and of management—in the establishment of working conditions.

Financial solidarity was an important aspect of management's resistance, taking the form of strike funds, first temporary then institutionalised. These new methods of collaboration lasted beyond the strikes. Cooperation thus extended to a national level with adhesions to the French's traders and industrials Fédération while the professional landscape was rationalized through the fusion of different management unions.

Starting in 1906, management organisations began systematizing the communication of their positions to the press, in order to combat labour's arguments. Their riposte increased in intensity in 1907 with the novel use of a lock-out in answer to the rotating strike which was then targeting the sector of fantasy jewellery. During this conflict collusion with management-controlled labour unions was used, along with aid to unemployment insurance cooperatives.

These different tactics allowed management to limit the strikes' impact. Nonetheless, these labour movements helped transform the management business associations into veritable unions, responsible for working conditions and thus the logical conversation partner for labour organisations. This unfinished evolution was observable in the unilateral propositions made to striking workers by their bosses, the result of internal coordination within the management chambers of commerce.