



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Liberian teachers strike for salary increases, transportation, and benefits, 2012-2014

Time period notes: MCSSTA notified the government of their plans to strike following meeting on 13 September. When government failed to respond, teachers carried out their intended action as scheduled in mid October.

13 September

2012

to: 6 June

2014

Country: Liberia

Location City/State/Province: Monrovia

Location Description: The capital city of Liberia

Goals:

In 2012: MCSSTA demanded salary increases based on teacher qualifications, government provided transportation for MCSS teachers, and teacher scholarship opportunities.

In 2014: MCSSTA demanded a 50 dollar transportation allowance be added to teacher salaries, payment of 90 teachers' retroactive salaries, and that the CSA acquire signatures from teachers before making deductions from their salaries for union dues and insurance.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 104. Professional strike
- 163. Stand-in
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention

- 104. Professional strike

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- MCSSTA Teachers
- students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Benedict Wreh (MCSSTA president-2012), M. Glen Mason (MCSSTA secretary), Henry G. Woyea (MCSSTA president-2014)

Partners:

MCSS students

External allies:

not known

Involvement of social elites:

not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- MCSSTA teachers (enter and exit)
- Students (enter and exit)

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- MCSSTA teachers

Segment Length: 3.5 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Government of Liberia

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

not known

Campaigner violence:

not known

Repressive Violence:

not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

2 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Teachers did gain some salary increments, though they fell far short of what teachers initially demanded. Teachers also won on the demand that the CSA be mandated to acquire signed consent before it can deduct from teacher salaries.

A lack of communication caused some confusion over when strike actions were called off.

In Liberia, a small country on the west coast of Africa, the Monrovia Consolidated School System (MCSS) oversaw all public schools in the capital city of Monrovia. Its three main high school campuses were William V.S. Tubman, G.W. Gibson, and D-Tweh High School. As of 2013, enrollment in MCSS schools totaled over 20,000 students.

The Monrovia Consolidated School System Teachers Association (MCSSTA) had continually tried to engage constructively with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who had been in office since 2006, asking for higher wages so that teachers could have a decent standard of living. MCSSTA President Benedict Wreh stated that teacher salaries in Liberia normally ranged from 140 to 500 US dollars per month, but the lowest paid teachers barely made over 100 dollars. President Sirleaf continually claimed that the government could not afford to raise teacher salaries until “ghost names” were removed from teacher payrolls, to which the government claimed, as of 2012, they had lost more than 20 million dollars.

On 13 September 2012, MCSSTA executives held a joint session with the MCSS Faculty Representative Council and passed resolutions calling on the Central Government to increase salaries of the teachers and support staff. They said that janitors should be paid a minimum of 200 US dollars, \$250 for entry-level certified teachers with C Certificates up to \$750 for Master degree holders. They demanded that government provide at least four buses for transporting MCSS teachers or add travel allowances to their salaries. They also demanded that the government provide scholarship opportunities for advancement of teachers’ education. MCSSTA informed the government that on Thursday 11 October 2012, they would call on all MCSS teachers to lay down their chalk and engage in a strike action until government meets their demands.

On 10 October, teachers announced an indefinite “GO SLOW” strike action, and by Monday, 15 October, teachers at G.W. Gibson, D-Tweh, William V.S. Tubman high schools and Matilda Newport Junior High School had deserted their classrooms, and MCSSTA secretary M. Glen Mason issued a statement to the government formally listing teacher demands. MCSSTA called on teachers to calmly and quietly leave their posts and join the cause in gaining new respect and hope for the honorable profession of teaching. Teachers from several other public schools in Monrovia soon joined the MCSS teachers’ strike.

The government asked the teachers to return to work, stating that it would address their demands early next year after the

government removed ghost names from payrolls. Teachers ignored these initial pleas as President Sirleaf had not even yet conceded to meet with MCSSTA executives.

Public school students were frustrated about missing school while private schools still held classes. As teachers entered the second full week of their strike, students promised that if government did not intervene, they would take to the streets in demonstration.

On 22 October, over 1,000 students from all MCSS schools marched to the president's office and engaged in a stand in until President Sirleaf agreed to meet with them. Students, most wearing their school uniforms, carried placards reading phrases such as, "Madam President, we seek your intervention" and "We don't want to use force." Students set up road blockades around the demonstration and greatly impeded traffic in one of the capital city's major intersections throughout the day. Abraham Samukai, one of the student leaders, stated that their demonstration was peaceful, and it meant to draw the attention of the government and the Liberian people to the situation of their school system.

As the size and intensity of the protest mounted, President Sirleaf agreed to meet with a delegation of eight students, including leading high school students, Samkuai and Prince Dumoe. The students stated that if MCSS schools did not reopen tomorrow, they would act to close the private schools, where the government officials' children attended. Sirleaf told the students to return to school the next day, assuring them that the teachers would return and that she herself would visit some of the schools to assess the situation. Later that day, Sirleaf met with MCSSTA executives.

On October 23 and over the following week, teachers began returning to work out of respect for President Sirleaf and in fear that the situation of students demonstrating in the streets would deteriorate with police violence. Secretary Mason claimed that, although teachers were returning to schools, they did not plan to back down on demands. President Sirleaf visited MCSS schools and thanked the teachers for returning to work, promising that the government would look into their grievances. Government representatives visited all MCSS schools over the week, taking roll call of employees.

In January 2013, Sirleaf granted a 25 US dollar monthly increase on all teacher salaries. Most teachers were unsatisfied with this small gain.

In the 2013-2014 school year, the government promised to increase the salaries of 90 MCSS teachers according to their qualifications and promised to pay them these retroactive salaries by the end of the school year. By June 2014, teachers still had not seen any of the promised salary increases reflected in their paychecks. MCSS superintendent Benjamin Jacobs claimed to have tried adding buses to accommodate teachers, but the cost of fuel and maintenance impeded plans. President Sirleaf further told teachers that the government did not have the money to provide an alternative transportation allowance for teachers.

MCCSTA, now led by President Henry G Woyea and the Faculty Representative Council, held a joint session on 26 May 2014 at G. W. Gibson High School and passed a resolution stating that if the government did nothing to address their demands within 72 hours, the MCSS teachers would launch an indefinite strike. They demanded that the government add 50 dollars to the salaries of teachers and supporting staff for transportation, payment of retroactive salaries for the 90 teachers, and the requirement of signed consent of teachers before the Civil Service Agency could make salary deductions for union dues and insurances.

On 2 June, teachers began their strike, leaving no one to administer the students' final exams. The superintendent called on unqualified community members to administer exams. Rumors circulated that the government would dismiss all teachers who participated in the strike, but teachers called this bluff and continued in their action.

Government, weary of another teacher strike, conceded to two out of three of the teachers demands. The 90 teachers' retroactive pay was reflected in their June salaries, and CSA now needed to obtain signatures so that deductions from teacher salaries appeared clearly on their paychecks as opposed to irregular, unexplained deductions.

On Friday 6 June 2014, MCSS teachers agreed to return to the classrooms and the strike officially ended the following Monday.

Research Notes

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