



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Republic of Chad government employees strike for wages, 2007

2 May

2007

to: 27 August

2007

Country: Chad

Location City/State/Province: *N'Djamena, Bongor, Sarh, and Gounou Gaya*

Goals:

Government workers demanded a review of public service wage scales, an increase in the minimum wage, a major increase in retirement pensions, and family allowances in line with the cost of living. Some reports indicate unions demanded a wage increase of up to 300 percent (claim by union leader Antoinette Moalbaye).

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 104. Professional strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 104. Professional strike
- 107. Sympathy strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 104. Professional strike

Methods in 4th segment:

- 104. Professional strike

Methods in 5th segment:

- 104. Professional strike

Methods in 6th segment:

- 104. Professional strike

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Government workers and government worker unions

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Djibrine Assali, secretary general of the Union des Syndicats du Tchad (UST); Antoinette Moalbaye, union leader and university professor in N'Djamena

Partners:

Not Known

External allies:

The Women Fishmongers' Union (SYFEVEP); workers in some unnamed private sector companies; students (little information known about student involvement); International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

Involvement of social elites:

Not Known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Chadian Teachers' Union (SET)
- International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)
- The Intersyndicale (cross-union coalition)
- Union des Syndicats du Tchad (UST)

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- The Women Fishmongers' Union (SYFEVEP)

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 3 weeks*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Republic of Chad's government under President Idriss Déby; National and Nomadic Guard of Chad (GNNT)

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

Not Known

Repressive Violence:

Security forces raided and occupied union headquarters; workers were intimidated, penalized, transferred, and fired; in some instances, GNNT and police shot at students and workers, injuring several.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

1 point out of 6 points

Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

While the Chadian government did offer a small wage increase and an increase in pension benefits during the course of the strike, union leaders rejected the offer. Overall, the government seems to have dismissed the strike, working along the way to intimidate strikers and shut down the Intersyndicale. The strike was ended largely due to intimidation and repression, and generally 'loosing steam'. While there are indications that some workers received modest wage increases, little seemed to change for the large majority of government workers following the strike.

While little information could be found about the Intersyndicale of Chad in 2007, it is clear that several government unions and groups of workers joined to create a cross-union coalition called the Intersyndicale. While the Intersyndicale seemed to incorporate a large number of government workers during the strike, the organization didn't grow beyond the 'civil servant' sector.

The Intersyndicale lasted throughout the strike, making the decision to call off the strike. However, the Chadian Teachers' Union (SET) (and possibly others) were allegedly bribed by the Minister for Infrastructure to leave strike, which weakened the organization of the Intersyndicale.

In the mid-1990s, basic government functions were being restored in the Republic of Chad after years of violent political turmoil. President Idriss Déby entered into deals with the World Bank and the IMF to carry out economic reforms, including oil exploitation in June 2000. By 2001, Déby's first-round 'reelection' victory was riddled with corruption, fraud, and intimidation of political opposition.

According to the United Nations, Chad has been in a state of humanitarian crisis since at least 2001, and ranks as one the poorest countries in the world with up to 80% of the population living below the poverty line. In 2005, Chad declared a state of war with neighboring Sudan. As of 2008, over 280,000 refugees from Sudan's Darfur region claimed asylum in eastern Chad in addition to 55,000 refugees from the Central African Republic and 170,000 internally displaced persons.

By spring 2007, the general population of Chad, including government employees, was not benefiting as promised from the country's oil revenues. Instead, it was believed that much of the oil revenue was being used to fund war against 'rebels' and armed conflict with Sudan.

On May 2, most of the country's 32,000 civil servants began a strike, which included government-run schools, hospitals, clinics, and administrative services. They organized a confederation, the Intersyndicale, composed of the Union des Syndicats du Tchad

(UST) and several independent unions. Workers demanded a review of public service wage scales, an increase in the minimum wage, a major increase in retirement pensions, and family allowances in line with the cost of living. Some reports indicate unions demanded a wage increase of up to 300 percent. Within the first five days of the strike, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) called upon the President of Chad to respond to employee demands, but no progress was made in the negotiations.

Public employees continued the strike throughout the month of May. By the 31st, Chad's President Déby offered strikers a 12-15% salary increase and an increase in pension benefits. Union leaders, including Djibrine Assali, secretary general of UST, declined the offer, demanding at least a 25 percent increase. At this time, health workers began to restore minimum health services in Chad; some sources claim they rejected the government offer while restoring services, while others report they accepted a 15 percent pay increase.

Public support for the strike varied. In fact, so much of the population was poor or unemployed, and they viewed public employees as already being much better off. Many were quick to point out that the strike was only in the interest of public servants and were disgruntled with the temporary stoppage of government infrastructure. Because of the lack of public services during the strike, some found it difficult to get medical care. When public hospitals couldn't take a patient because of the strike, their only option was a private clinic, which most of time was too expensive. The strike also coincided with important high school exams, which were disrupted as teachers went on strike.

Interestingly, during the course of the strike, conditions of the Chadian soldiers reportedly improved, with many receiving new uniforms and vehicles. They never showed support for the civil servants' strike throughout the course of the campaign.

However, others offered support to the strikers. The Women Fishmongers' Union (SYFEVEP), struggling against anti-union repression of its own, stopped work for three days to support the strike by the Intersyndicale. Some workers in several private sector companies stopped work in solidarity with the strikers as well.

Also, about one month into the strike, Chad's Minister of Public Works and Employment introduced a new law that would prevent government employees who provide 'essential services' from striking and would prolong the time before a strike could take place. Union leaders claimed the law was a deliberate aim to undermine the strike. The extension of the definition of 'essential services' meant authorities could charge nearly anyone.

On June 5, security forces raided trade union headquarters, preventing strikers from entering. The head office of the Chadian Teachers' Union (SET), affiliated with the Intersyndicale, was occupied soon after by police officers. Measures were also taken to prevent Djibrine Assali of UST from taking part in the ILO International Labor Conference. His passport was confiscated in late May when trying to fly to Geneva. Many workers were penalized, transferred, and fired.

Anti-union repression was concentrated in, but not confined to N'Djamena, the nation's capital. In Bongor, 300 km away, the National and Nomadic Guard of Chad (GNNT) shot at demonstrating students and workers. In Sarh and Gounou Gaya, in the south of Chad, police also shot at demonstrators. Several were injured.

As trade union organizations from around the globe expressed their solidarity, on June 5, the ITUC reiterated its call for the Chadian government and security forces to bring an immediate end to the violence and to respond to the demands of the striking workers without further delay, but again no progress was made. Instead, the government refused to negotiate with the cross-union grouping, the Intersyndicale, then issued an order to dissolve it.

On June 29, the Chadian Teachers' Union withdrew from the strike, weakening the campaign. Several reports indicate the withdrawal was due to bribes made to the union by the Minister for Infrastructure.

On August 27, pending arbitration by the ITUC in Geneva, Chadian union leaders of the Intersyndicale suspended the strike without reaching an agreement with the government. Union leaders recall that the pressure on workers was too strong. There were increasing violations of trade union rights, many activists were intimidated, and the campaign was running out of steam.

There are indications that organizations affiliated with the Intersyndicale drafted an agreement, which included some of the strike demands, after the strike was ended, but there is no indication that they were later respected. However, some claim that the strike proved to the country the significance of the government worker unions as a powerful disrupted force. It is also alleged that some, if few, of the strikers were awarded modest salary increases.

Research Notes

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Additional Notes:

Areas of possible further research:

Geography: There was some indication of geographic power dynamics at play during the strike, i.e. references to the 'northern elite.' More information is needed about where Intersyndicale activity was concentrated in Chad and how it affected the campaign.

The Intersyndicale: As noted above, more information would be helpful regarding the composition and organization of the Intersyndicale, including leaders, internal organization, and the different groups that comprised it.

Most importantly, little information was found regarding the breadth of tactics used throughout the strike. More information is needed as to how (if applicable) the campaigners waged their strike in ways other than work stoppage, including demonstrations, messaging, communication, etc.

Edited by Max Rennebohm (14/06/2011)

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Zein Nakhoda, 14/05/2011

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