

Strike in France causes massive chaos in Paris and other cities



Paris, December 7 (RHC)-- A nationwide general strike continued to paralyze France in protests over planned pension reforms by the government, causing chaos across the country.

Schools remained closed on Friday and hospitals were understaffed. Reports said the cancellation of rush-hour trains into Paris has caused a huge traffic jam around the capital. According to traffic app Styadin, traffic jams totaling more than 350 kilometers clogged the main roads in and around the capital as many commuters took to their cars.

On the first day of the general strike on Thursday, about a million workers held protests that later turned violent after police tear-gassed demonstrators in Paris.

The strike, the largest in 25 years -- since 1995 -- was started against President Emmanuel Macron's plan to overhaul the pension system that would see workers retiring later or facing reduced payouts.}

Hundreds of thousands of strikers paralyzed the transport system on the first day of industrial action which prompted closure of schools across the nation. According to union leaders, more than 1.5 million people turned out across the country, with police using tear gas to disperse them.

Just in Paris alone, tens of thousands of people took to the streets, while more than 6,000 police officers were deployed with a decree to forbid the protesters from gathering on the Champs-Élysées or at police stations. Police in riot gear used tear gas and truncheons to disperse protesters near the Place de la Republique. In Paris, most of the metro system shut down and hundreds of flights cancelled.

Union leaders warned that the strike could last at least until Monday if the government did not take the right action. "The strike is not going to stop tonight," said Philippe Martinez, secretary general of the CGT union.

Paris's bus and metro operator have said their walkout will last until Monday at the very least. French President Macron is already faced with a major challenge to his rule from "Yellow Vest" protesters, who have been holding weekly demonstrations for more than a year.

Trade union leaders are now calling on Macron to abandon his campaign promise to overhaul the retirement system. The president has said he wants to simplify the country's complex retirement system, which comprises more than 40 different plans, many with different retirement ages and benefits.

The new system will introduce a "points system" for retirement, which will have a significant impact on the public sector. Until now, the sector had enjoyed special retirement systems to compensate for difficult working conditions.

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