

French trade unions vow 'marathon' of ongoing strikes



Paris, April 11 (RHC)-- In France, General Confederation of Labor union officials said train workers are ready for a “marathon” of strikes and demonstrations as government refuses to "budge an inch."

Train workers in France returned to the streets in recent days to continue their three month's long nationwide rolling strikes in protest of President Emmanuel Macron's economic reforms.

Negotiations between the government and workers have reached a stalemate. While some labor unions are stiffening their resistance, the government is not budging on the main feature of its reform, which is, ending the job-for-life guarantees for rail staff, according to Reuters.

“The status quo is not viable,” Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said in an interview published in the Sunday edition of the Le Parisien newspaper. “It’s urgent, we need to advance, and everyone should know we are determined to see this through to the end.”

General Confederation of Labor, or CGT, union officials said that strikes could carry on past June if productive negotiations with the government don't resume and that train workers well-ready for a “marathon” of strikes and demonstrations.

The shake-up of the state-run railway SNCF, which also includes ending early retirement for rail workers, comes before the monopoly is opened to competition in line with European Union rules.

The government argues the overhaul will help transform the heavily indebted company into a profitable public service, but workers have hit back with complaints the SNCF was being dismantled to pave the way for privatization.

Unions have also accused the government of refusing to budge an inch. Officials at the more reform-minded CFDT union said they did not want a drawn-out conflict but that their proposed amendments to the shake-up had fallen on deaf ears.

Locking horns with the rail sector has backfired on previous French governments, such as the paralyzing train strikes in 1995 that forced then-Prime Minister Alain Juppe to pull planned reforms.

Meanwhile, students have disrupted several universities across France in protest at a planned new selection system in higher education. Garbage collectors and other public workers have also held demonstrations leaving the young government in a tough position.

Though nowhere near as potent, the various protests come as France prepares to mark the 50th anniversary of the student-led riots of May 1968, which gridlocked the country and led to the adoption of more progressive social policies.

While the strikes keep on rolling, travelers have been left with empty rail stations, trying to figure out alternative means of transportation. The rolling strikes, which began last week, were met with police repression in Paris and Lyon. Union organizers have called for stoppages two out of every five work days until the end of June.

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