



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Burundian civil servants strike for pay increase, 2007

***Time period notes:** Although the Confederation of Burundi Labor Unions (COSYBU) had begun writing letters and threatening to strike as early as September 2007, the November starting date was determined because COSYBU had waited to see what the new presidential cabinet would do around the issue when it first met in late November. It was not until after this first cabinet meeting that COSYBU decided to take specific action around the issue of the 34 percent salary increase.*

November 29,
2007

to: December 17,
2007

Country: Burundi

Goals:

The implementation of the promised 34 percent salary increase for civil servants that the government had promised in May 2007 with retroactive pay to July 2007, when the increased salary was meant to be implemented.

The implementation of a framework for open dialogue between the government and civil servants around the salary increase.

A review of civil servant statutes

Secondarily: an end to corruption in the Burundi government

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 097. Protest strike › By Civil Servants

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 097. Protest strike › By Civil Servants

Methods in 4th segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention

- 104. Professional strike
- 107. Sympathy strike › By Health Workers

Methods in 5th segment:

- 104. Professional strike
- 107. Sympathy strike › By Health Workers

Methods in 6th segment:

- 013. Deputations
- 104. Professional strike
- 107. Sympathy strike › By Health Workers

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Burundi's civil servants
- administrative workers
- primary school teachers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Confederation of Burundi Labor Unions (COSYBU); Confederation of Free Unions of Burundi (CSB); the head of COSYBU, Tharcisse Gahungu

Partners:

The Burundi Union of Nurses and Health Workers (SYN-APA); Union of Workers at the University of Burundi

External allies:

Not Known

Involvement of social elites:

Not Known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- COSYBU; CSB

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Workers at the University of Burundi

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

- 5000 nurses and health workers from SYN-APA

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 3 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

President Nkurunziza and the Burundian Government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

Not Known

Repressive Violence:

Police arrested 4 union representatives and followed other union leaders to the extent that many union leaders went into hiding to avoid arrest.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

With the help of a mediator the 34 percent salary increase was implemented, but it is still unclear from sources if civil servants' statutes have been reviewed. For this reason the success score of 5 has been awarded because the civil servants did succeed in opening a dialogue with the government and getting the main goal of the wage increase.

All the trade unions and confederations remained intact after the campaign.

The campaign generated high strike participation (85-90%) from civil servants and University workers and 5,000 health workers joined the campaign as well.

In May 2007, Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza announced a 34 percent salary increase for all civil servants in Burundi. This increase, which the government was to implement in July 2007, followed a year after the government had more than doubled the salaries of military and security personnel. Despite President Nkurunziza's promise, the International Monetary Fund, which provided much of the international aid to Burundi, urged against the salary increase. Citing lack of funds, by September 2007 the government had still not implemented the 34 percent increase while Nkurunziza's government continued to increase fees and taxes.

Due to the government's lack of action or explanation in setting up the promised increase, in September the Confederation of Burundi Labor Unions (COSYBU), which was a coalition of 25 unions and represented 70 percent of Burundi's civil servants at the time, wrote a letter to the president demanding a deadline for the implementation pay increase. COSYBU also wanted the increase to be retroactive to July when the civil servants' salaries were supposed to be raised. A few weeks later the finance minister pushed the implementation date back to January 2008 and other officials promised retroactive payments as well.

When the government put the increase on hold altogether in late October, COSYBU threatened to begin an indefinite strike until the government fulfilled its salary increment promise. Later, the finance minister restated the January 2008 date for the beginning of the increase, but said it would not be retroactive to July despite previous promises. The government claimed that the increase was heavily reliant on donations from sources of international aid from sources like the International Monetary Fund; however, these donors had refused to send aid to Burundi citing poor governance and poor economic choices such as the purchasing of a new presidential jet.

Despite COSYBU's threat to begin an indefinite strike, the confederation delayed calling such an action until President Nkurunziza had replaced his cabinet. However, when the new cabinet first met in November, the ministers still did not to address the issue of a 34 percent salary increase for civil servants. At the end of November COSYBU partnered with the Confederation of Free Unions of Burundi (CSB) and called for a three-day strike to begin on Monday December 3, 2007. Combined, COSYBU and the smaller CSB represented approximately 41,000 civil servants. In addition to the implementation of the salary increase, the two confederations also wanted the government review civil servants' statutes and to set up a framework for dialogue between the government and civil servants.

In the weekend before the civil servants were to begin their strike the civil service minister and the government as a whole made announcements on national radio and television urging civil servants not to strike. Despite these urgings, the two confederations confirmed their plan to strike and the union of the workers at the University of Burundi also decided to join the action even though they had not been included in the original promise for wage increases.

On December 3, between 85 and 90 percent of civil servants from around the country went on strike. The strikers included primary school teachers, who made up two thirds of government workers, administrative workers and all other civil servants who were not considered "essential" workers. In response, the government deemed the strike illegal. President Nkurunziza asked workers to suspend their strike and promised to implement the wage increase when the country's finances improved. Nonetheless, the civil servants continued to demand retroactive implementation of the salary increase and open dialogue with the government on the issue.

On the second day of the strike the government arrested four union representatives from the Burundi Teachers Union that represented the striking primary school teachers. The strike leaders demanded that the government release the arrested union representatives and threatened to extend the strike if they were not released. Other union leaders had to go into hiding to avoid arrests. Although the strike was supposed to end after Wednesday December 5, COSYBU and CSB extended the strike by two days because of the arrests.

The government would still not enter into talks with the confederation leaders even though that same week the government had increased pay for special judicial workers, who were not part of the strike. Despite the release of the imprisoned union representatives, on December 7 the civil servant leaders announced that the strike would continue indefinitely until the government began negotiations with the labor leaders. This announcement followed the decision of 5,000 nurses and other health workers to join the strike.

As the civil servants continued their 90 percent participation in the strike, only essential workers in the ministry of public health remained at work. All through the next week civil servants remained on strike and hospitals began to suffer because of the striking nurses.

After two weeks of strikes, the government began negotiations with COSYBU and CSB leaders. With the beginning of open

negotiations, the civil servants ended their strike and returned to work on Monday December 17. That week Burundi's Vice President set up a commission for further negotiations with civil servant leaders. With the help of a mediator in negotiations, the government granted the 34% salary increase to the civil servants. It is not clear from sources if the civil servants' statutes were reviewed.

Research Notes

Influences:

Not Known

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All above sources accessed through LexisNexis Academic on 12 February 2011.

Additional Notes:

This was considered by many news sources as the first indefinite strike in the history of Burundi. Previous strikes had all been for set periods time, just as this strike had been announced as a three-day strike.

Information about the success of the strike (that the 34% salary increase was granted) was taken from personal e-mail communication with Confédération des Syndicats Libres du Burundi (CSB) on May 12, 2011

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

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