



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Union (CELU) general strikes for wages and union rights, 1974

*Time period notes: The exact start date is not clear*

March

1974

to: March 12,

1974

**Country:** Ethiopia

**Goals:**

1. An increase in wages.
2. The right for those in government employment to unionize.
3. There were also more demands, considered less important, which included pension coverage, insurance, suspension of the Education Sector Review, revision of labour laws.

### Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 006. Group or mass petitions

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 116. Generalised strike

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 116. Generalised strike

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 116. Generalised strike

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 116. Generalised strike

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 006. Group or mass petitions

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Economic Justice

**Group characterization:**

- Workers from the private sector
- union members

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU)

**Partners:**

Not known

**External allies:**

Not known

**Involvement of social elites:**

Not known

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Additional notes on joining/exiting order:**

Joining order not known

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 1 day*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

The Ethiopian government

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

After the government agreed to the strikers' demands, the Employers' Federation of Ethiopia created their own petition

**Campaigner violence:**

None known

**Repressive Violence:**

None known

## Success Outcome

### Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

### Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

### Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

### Notes on outcomes:

The government issued a 17-point agreement, which officially committed it to meet all of CELU's demands within three months. As for growth, after the demands were met, CELU membership increased by half its size, but had grown during the campaign.

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For seven years prior to 1974 university students initiated protests against specific policies of the government of Emperor Haile Selassie, protests which grew into a campaign for democracy. (See in this database "Ethiopian students protest against Emperor Selassie's regime, 1967-1974.") The government responded with violent repression and opposition grew to the point that the student movement more or less merged with a broader campaign against dictatorship led by the workers.

Starting in mid-January 1974, Ethiopian soldiers in several bases mutinied. They called for an increase in pay and better living conditions. On February 18, the capital's taxi drivers, university teachers, and students went on strike and crowded the streets of Addis Ababa with demonstrations. Due to a recent rise in gas prices caused by the OPEC increases, the taxi drivers wanted a decrease in gas prices. Meanwhile, the teachers and students had a variety of demands. In a petition that the Teacher Association submitted before the strike, they demanded the suspension of a recent reform called the Education Sector Review, increases in pay, and a range of demands from revision of demonstration laws to the addition of pensions for industrial workers.

In the following weeks, the demonstrations turned riotous and resulted in the deaths of three people and the injury of twenty-two. In addition, many cars, buses, trains, and houses were damaged and over 500 individuals were arrested. Yet, by mid-March the soldiers and taxi drivers had ended their protests, because the government met their demands. In addition, the teachers also ended their strike and resumed teaching after March 20, though many students still refused to return.

Throughout the February uprising, the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Union (CELU) remained indifferent. Yet in March, CELU petitioned the government with a list of demands and the warning that if their demands were not met, CELU would commence a general strike. Their demands included the introduction of pension coverage and insurance, the postponement of the Education Sector Review, and revision of labour laws. Still, their chief goals were to attain an increase in wages and the right for government employees to unionize.

The government ignored CELU's demands and on March 8, 1974, the members of CELU went on strike. With 85,000 members, the CELU strike effectively immobilized the majority of Ethiopia. After four days, the government issued an official agreement with seventeen points in which it agreed to meet CELU's demands within three months. Consequently, the strike ended. Yet, both CELU and the government came out victorious, CELU emerged with the government's promise to meet their demands and the government was blessed with the end of a crippling strike. Thus, the CELU campaign concluded.

Unsurprisingly, the Employers' Federation of Ethiopia was extremely opposed to both the strike and resulting agreement. The Federation created their own petition, which they gave to the Labour Relations Board. It demanded that the CELU strike be proclaimed illegal and the agreement invalid. The board did declare the strike illegal, but did not annul the agreement. Furthermore, they did not give the Federation members the power to take action against anyone who had participated in the strike.

Though CELU's strike ended, other workers' strikes began. The Civil Aviation Agency and the Ethiopian Tobacco Monopoly

both submitted demands to the government and began their strikes once those demands were denied.

In the aftermath of the campaign, a recently formed committee in the army, known as the Derg, began to oppose the government. Eventually this led to a coup d'état, which removed the Emperor and ended the *ancien régime*.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

CELU's success influenced two labour strikes: One by the Civil Aviation Agency and the other by the Ethiopian Tobacco Monopoly, both of which took place in March 1974 immediately following the end of CELU's strike. They both followed CELU's blueprint of submitting a petition threatening a strike, and beginning the strike once the demands were ignored. (2)

### Sources:

Haile-Selassie, Teferra. *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1991*. New York: Kegan Paul International, 1997.

Halliday, Fred and Maxine Molyneux. *The Ethiopian Revolution*. Norfolk: The Thetford Press Ltd., 1981.

Tiruneh, Andargachew. *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

### Additional Notes:

CELU's campaign occurred just after a series of protests had subsided in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. Though CELU remained indifferent and uninvolved in those demonstrations, it seems likely that CELU's strike took direct advantage of the government's instability and the climate of political unrest.

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

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