The Force Ouvrière labor union strikes for economic justice and education, Wallis and Futuna, 1994

February
1994
to: 15 June
1994

Country: Wallis and Futuna

Goals:
The creation of a public education system in primary schools, the application of French labor law to Wallis and Futuna, the lowering of transportation costs to the island, an increase in the minimum wage, and a lower cost of living.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 013. Deputations
- 117. General strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 013. Deputations

Methods in 3rd segment:
Methods in 4th segment:
Methods in 5th segment:
Methods in 6th segment:

- 013. Deputations
- 038. Marches
- 048. Protest meetings
- 097. Protest strike
- 104. Professional strike
- 116. Generalised strike

Classifications

Classification:
Change

Cluster:
Economic Justice
Human Rights
Group characterization:

- Schoolteachers and members of the Force Ouvrière union

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Force Ouvrière labor union
Partners:
Wallisian schoolteachers
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:

- Wallisian school teachers

Segment Length: *Approximately 3 weeks*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:
The government of Wallis and Futuna and the French government
Nonviolent responses of opponent:
In collaboration with Force Ouvrière, the Wallisian government set up work groups and meetings to deal with the union's grievances and end the February strike.
Campaigner violence:
Following the second general strike, protesters attacked several government buildings, and set the Territorial Assembly on fire.
Repressive Violence:
Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
3 points out of 6 points
Survival:
1 point out of 1 points
Growth:
2 points out of 3 points
Notes on outcomes:
As a result of the campaign some of the French Labor Code was applied to Wallis and Futuna, but the protesters did not lower the cost of living or transportation costs. The government did create a system of public primary schools and also raised the minimum wage. The campaign gets one point for survival because the infrastructure remained throughout the campaign, and gets two points for growth because it only achieved a moderate amount of growth.

Wallis and Futuna is an overseas department of France situated in the Pacific, 225 miles west of Samoa and 300 miles northeast of Fiji. The islands' population stands at around 15,000 people. Between February and June of 1994, the Force Ouvrière union on Wallis and Futuna organized strikes for a variety of demands chiefly dealing with the high cost of living and the lack of a public educational option in primary school.

The first action began in February, during the visit of the French Minister of Overseas Territories Dominique Perben, when the Force Ouvrière union called a general strike. The goal of the strike was aimed at having French labor law applied to Wallis and Futuna, as well as raising the minimum wage and lowering the cost of transportation required to reach the islands. The strike caused the Wallis and Futuna government, Force Ouvrière, and representatives from the Ministry of Overseas Territories to get together and come to an agreement. They drafted a document that set up work groups to study the grievances of both sides and a calendar that scheduled regular meetings between the different factions. Force Ouvrière voluntarily called off the strike after it signed the agreement.

In early June, schoolteachers held a strike to demand the creation of public primary schools. At the time, the Catholic Church, of which most residents are members, ran every primary school in Wallis and Futuna. This strike also coincided with the visit of an important official; this time, it was Fijian President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. By this time, the workshops and meetings promised by the government had ceased without the consent of Force Ouvrière, making the union quite bitter. Therefore, a week after the teachers' strike began, Force Ouvrière joined forces with the teachers on June 13. The strikers also met to plan their actions and held demonstrations.

The strike continued peacefully for the two days following the 13th, but protestors broke the peace on the night of the 14th. They trashed government buildings, and while they never claimed responsibility, reports indicated that they threw Molotov cocktails into the Territorial Assembly, damaging the building. Following the violence, the two sides once again met to resolve the conflict. The high commissioner for New Caledonia, Alan Christnacht, chaired the meetings. The meetings ended the strike and successfully restored order to the islands and initiated dialogue between the two sides.

The campaign achieved some of its goals, including the raising of the minimum wage, and the creation of public primary schools. Following the campaign, the government set up government-run primary schools in every village. The campaign, however, was brought to an abrupt end by the violence on June 14-15.

Research Notes

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