



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Gabon health workers win strike for wages and equipment, 2009

12 January

2009

to: 1 May

2009

Country: Gabon

Location City/State/Province: Libreville

Goals:

They demanded that the government provide higher wages and better working conditions and recommit to its agreement from a previous strike in 2003. Workers also sought more modern equipment for their hospitals so that they could provide care comparable to that of the high-tech private hospitals with which the public hospital competed.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 106. Industry strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 106. Industry strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 106. Industry strike

Methods in 4th segment:

- 106. Industry strike

Methods in 5th segment:

- 106. Industry strike

Methods in 6th segment:

- 106. Industry strike

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 104. Professional strike

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- health workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Serghes Mikala, SYNAPS

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- SYNAPS

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 20 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Idris Ngari, Ministry of Health

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

0 points out of 3 points

On 12 January 2009 the health workers in Gabon's public hospitals in Libreville went on strike. Following a prominent and successful strike in the education sector, health workers were inspired to begin their own campaign. They demanded that the government provide higher wages and better working conditions and recommit to its agreement from a previous strike in 2003. Workers also sought more modern equipment for their hospitals so that they could provide care comparable to that of the high-tech private hospitals with which the public hospital competed.

Organized by the hospital workers union SYNAPS and its leader Serghes Mikala, the hospital maintained a few basic services during the first part of the strike. In Gabon the availability of private hospitals in Gabon depended on income. A visit to a private hospital would cost about forty American dollars, whereas treatment in the public hospital was free for students and seniors and six dollars for everybody else. For this reason, almost everybody was used to going to the public hospital.

After some weeks, the public hospital workers expanded their strike to the whole hospital. Sick people who could not afford the private hospital were endangered and in some cases died. According to the World Health Organization, there was a directly related rise in infant mortality during the strike. During this period, military health workers took over hospital services. This led to serious press criticism of the strike, which reduced public support.

On 14 March 2009, Gabon's first lady died after a long illness. The strike ceased in official mourning that lasted several days. During this period, SYNAPS negotiated an agreement with the state Health Minister, Idriss Ngari. The agreement was announced by Appolinaire Mouckila, the Health Ministry Communications Advisor. In the agreement, the union would reinstate the most essential services at the hospital so that critical cases could be treated. Serghes Mickala stated his optimism that a final deal might be reached.

By 27 April the government still had not agreed to improve workers conditions or pay higher salaries. In response, SYNAPS threatened to cut the most basic care at the hospital once again. By 1 May, the government had agreed to SYNAPS' conditions and health services in Libreville were restored.

Research Notes

Influences:

Influenced by a previous health workers' strike in 2003 (1). Influenced by a strike in the education sector (1).

Sources:

"Gabon's Health Sector in Crisis". Wikileaks. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/04/09LIBREVILLE138.html>

"Gabon : Le SYNAPS revient au front". Gaboneco. 30-09-2009. http://www.gaboneco.com/show_article.php?IDActu=15152

"Gabonese health workers to harden strike". Afrol News. 27-04-2009. <http://afrol.com/articles/33078>

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

Lydia Bailey, 31/04/2013

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