La Réunion workers campaign for greater buying power, 2009

March 5, 2009
to: March 31, 2009

Country: La Réunion
Country: France

Goals:
Some of the campaign's 62 points included: a decrease of the price of basic products by 20%, an increase of 200 euros for the lowest incomes, a decrease of the price of a tank of gas by 5 euros, a freeze on rent prices.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 013. Deputations
- 015. Group lobbying
- 038. Marches
- 039. Parades
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 013. Deputations
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 013. Deputations

Methods in 4th segment:

- 013. Deputations
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

- 013. Deputations

Methods in 6th segment:
• 013. Deputations

Notes on Methods:
It is unclear if any methods were used in the last three segments outside of the negotiations at the time.

Classifications

Classification:
Change
Cluster:
Economic Justice
Group characterization:
• Mainly members of labor unions

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Gilles Leperlier, leader of the Collectif des Organisations Syndicales, Politiques et Associatives de La Réunion (COSPAR, Collective of Unions, Political and Associative Organizations of La Réunion) which included 45 organizations of La Réunion.
Partners:
Not Known
External allies:
French unions, trade union collectives in Martinique and Guadeloupe
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:
All groups seemed to have been part of the campaign from the outset. No other known joining order
Segment Length: Approximately 4.5 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:
The administration of La Réunion, the French government
Nonviolent responses of opponent:
Campaigner violence:
Rocks thrown at police by campaigners on the outskirts of the demonstrations. Some demonstrators also began fires during one march.

Repressive Violence:
Police threw tear gas bombs at demonstrators.

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:
A subsidy of 200 euros as well as housing help was granted to those with minimum wage, poor workers, those with modest salaries, beneficiaries of single parent subsidies, and the unemployed. A decrease of prices of 254 of the most essential products was also granted; the price reduction would be between 5% and 20% depending on the product. These allowances, nevertheless, were compromises.

COSPAR survived through the campaign and continues to fight for further improvements in income and product prices.

The campaign grew rapidly to incorporate nearly 10,000 people into different rallies.

In the French Island of La Réunion located in the Indian Ocean, 52% of the inhabitants lived under the poverty line, 50% of the youth were underemployed and there was a 25% unemployment rate at the time of this campaign. This had been the situation for decades, but the recent increase in unemployment and inflation (which affected La Réunion in a greater way than it affected France) made life increasingly expensive in La Réunion. This economic crisis, coupled with the influence of the recent strikes and demonstrations in other French departments of Guadeloupe and Martinique, drove 45 political, community and social organizations, including labor unions, to create a collective called COSPAR (Collectif des Organisations Syndicales, Politiques et Associatives de La Réunion) on February 5, 2009. COSPAR’s aim was to improve the impossible living costs and employment situations of La Réunion.

COSPAR’s 62 points of change included a decrease of the price of basic products by 20%, an increase by 200 euros for the lowest incomes, a decrease of the price of a tank of gas by 5 euros, and a freeze on rent prices. On March 5, COSPAR organized a demonstration in order to urge the prefect to open the floor for negotiations about the 62 points. Thousands of demonstrators took to the streets of the capital, St. Denis, and the southern capital, Saint- Pierre. After parading on the streets without any incident, the leadership addressed the prefecture, and then the demonstrators went toward the supermarket, Leclerc. During the assembly’s movement toward the store there were clashes with the police and some demonstrators began fires.

After this demonstration, the gas companies and COSPAR held two days of negotiations to lower the price of gas on the evening of March 9. COSPAR wanted a 5-euro drop per tank, however the negotiations resulted in 3-euro drop. Negotiations with the administration addressing the other points were dropped.

On March 10, campaigners held two simultaneous demonstrations in the cities of St. Denis and Saint-Pierre in order to heighten the pressure on negotiations so that the State and the collective could come to an accord more quickly. On the outskirts of the demonstrations, some campaigners threw rocks at the police; the police responded with tear gas bombs. However, after these
two demonstrations, negotiations were resumed.

On March 19, ten thousand people assembled on the streets of St. Denis to call for a general strike. On March 19, 1946, the French National Assembly had unanimously passed a law that fully integrated the four colonies (French Guyana, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and La Réunion) and their inhabitants into the Republic. This meant that all laws adopted in France would also apply to the four departments, a right that took dozens of struggles to become a reality. In the year 2009, the demonstrators took this symbolic date in order to address the French state once again.

On March 31, COSPAR, the prefect, the Federation of Commerce and Retail, the Collective of merchants, and local producers signed a document entitled "Principle accord on the decrease of prices". This accord called for a decrease of prices of 254 of the most essential products; the price reduction would be between 5 and 20% depending on the product. The accord's agreements would come into effect until April 8, 2009.

After receiving pressure from the Caribbean islands and La Réunion, France announced that a subsidy of 200 euros as well as housing aid would be given to those with minimum wage, poor workers, those with modest salaries, beneficiaries of single parent subsidies, and the unemployed; this was also to be instated on April 2009. On April 7, these promises were given to the beneficiaries. An estimated 100,000 people benefited from the increase in the income. In total, the increases were worth 13 million euros per month.

At the time of writing, COSPAR continues to fight for a global accord that will benefit the whole of La Réunion society. COSPAR aims at lowering the price of even more consumer goods as well as ameliorating the incomes of the unemployed, the retired, the youth (ages 18-25), and scholarship students.

Research Notes

Influences:

The anti-inflation strikes in Martinique and Guadeloupe held in 2009 (See, "Martinique workers campaign against high living costs, 2009" and "Native Guadeloupeans campaign against high living costs, 2009") (1)

Sources:

"À l'appel du COSPAR: 19 mars de grève et de manifestations à La Réunion". Témoignages. 19 March 2009.

"Ce qui est déjà acté: Mesures obtenues par le COSPAR en faveur de tous". Témoignages. 7 April 2009.

Badroudine, Risham. 13 Millions d'euros de plus par mois pour les salariés Réunionnais: Hausse du revenu de 100.000 Réunionnais grâce au COSPAR". Témoignages. 11 June 2009.


**Additional Notes:**
Edited by Max Rennebohm (20/05/2011)

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Aurora Muñoz, 10/10/2009

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