



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Swiss railway workers strike against job cuts, 2008

March 7,
2008

to: April 5,
2008

Country: Switzerland

Location City/State/Province: Bellinzona, Ticino

Goals:

The workers demanded that the Federal Railways restructuring plan and a consequent 400+ job cuts be withdrawn

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 039. Parades
- 048. Protest meetings
- 105. Establishment strike
- 182. Stay-in strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 013. Deputations
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 105. Establishment strike
- 182. Stay-in strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 105. Establishment strike
- 182. Stay-in strike

Methods in 4th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 105. Establishment strike
- 182. Stay-in strike

Methods in 5th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 105. Establishment strike
- 182. Stay-in strike

Methods in 6th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 105. Establishment strike
- 182. Stay-in strike

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 016. Picketing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Swiss Federal Railway workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

The Strike Committee and the Solidarity Committee formed by the workers of Swiss Federal Railways – cargo division in Bellinzona. These workers represented SEV (Transport Workers' Union), UNIA (an active trade union in service industries), and Transfair (a Christian trade union).

Partners:

Not Known

External allies:

Group of politicians of Ticino canton (where Bellinzona is located), the bishop of Ticino

Involvement of social elites:

Group of politicians of Ticino canton, the bishop of Ticino

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Bishop of Ticino
- Politicians of Ticino

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 5 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Swiss Federal Railways and its cargo subsidiary in Bellinzona

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:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

the cargo division of Swiss Federal Railways withdrew its reconstructive plan, thus preventing the cutting of 400+ jobs.

The workers did not lose their jobs and stayed strong throughout and after the campaign, keeping the strike committees and organizing groups together.

By day 2 of the campaign, the participants grew from 420 workers to 8000 supporters, also garnering support from allies like the politicians of Ticino.

The cargo division of Swiss Federal Railways (SFR) had repeatedly been suffering financial deficits for a few years and even changed top management. On March 6, 2008, SFR announced a major restructuring plan that involved shutting down its

maintenance workshops; more than 400 jobs were to be cut as a consequence. 126 jobs were to be cut in the town of Bellinzona, Switzerland. These workers represented SEV (Transport Workers' Union), UNIA (an active trade union in service industries), and Transfair (a Christian trade union).

The workers demanded detailed information on the plan. In the morning of March 7, 2008, an assembly of workers demanded that SFR clarify the rumor of job cuts. They forced Nicolas Perrin, the managing director, to provide an answer and he said that the rumor was true; there would be job cuts. Immediately, 420 workers of Bellinzona depot rose up and threw Perrin out of the assembly hall. The workers then decided to go on strike indefinitely. They demanded the withdrawal of all plans for the job cuts. The workers elected a strike committee, with Gianni Frizzo as the chairman. The committee organized the campaign and managed the negotiations. They also formed a solidarity committee in every town and factory of the region in order to keep the strike running.

On March 8, more than 8,000 people marched along the streets of Bellinzona, waving flags and balloons that said "Hands off the job," and yelling the same phrase. On March 12, the SFR suspended the restructuring plans while the two sides held round-table talks for negotiation. The company offered a two-month suspension of job cuts if the strike ended. On the following day, the workers rejected the offer. On March 15, the workers made it clear that they demanded the withdrawal of all job cuts.

A group of politicians from Ticino (the region of which Bellinzona is a part) launched a solidarity fund. The strike workers collected more than one million francs (more than 600,000 Euros). The strikers also received political support from the Ticino canton government and the bishop of Ticino, who also coordinated financial aid.

During the strike, the strikers occupied the maintenance workshops and welded the rail tracks together to prevent trains and wagons from going in and out. Over Easter weekend, they also threatened to block the Gotthard Tunnel, blocking all traffic between the Ticino district and Italy. The workshops in Bellinzona were the only ones capable of producing special brakes for cargo trains, so their bargaining power proved to be a crucial factor. The strikers hung red flags from windows and balconies that said "Hands off the Workshops." They collected funds and signatures on street corners.

Realizing the economic constraints of the company, the strikers proposed a future management plan for the workshops that were intended to be closed.

On Saturday, April 5, 2008, Moritz Leuenberger, the head of the Federal Department of Transport, withdrew the plan for job cuts. The future of the cargo workshops remained undecided, but the jobs would not be cut for the time being.

Research Notes

Influences:

This strike was soon followed by a demonstration in Bern, organized by the industrial workers who were also to be affected by the restructure plan (2).

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Additional Notes:

Edited by Max Rennebohm (08/06/2011)

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

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