French Fight to Retire at 60

By Editor Test *Tue, Sep 28, 2010*

Traffic was snarled in France's cities last week, fewer than half of the Paris Metro's lines worked normally, and about half of the long-distance trains were canceled, as an estimated one million workers protested changes in pension laws.

Strikes and protests by a reported one million workers against French President Nicolas Sarkozy's plans to raise the country's retirement age to 62 from 60 disrupted most of France's air and rail services last week, according to press reports.

Traffic was snarled in France's cities, with fewer than half of the Paris Metro's lines working normally, according to the RATP public transit network. About half of France's long-distance trains were canceled, according to the SNCF state-run rail system. Limited train disruptions were expected to continue Friday.

The House of Representatives in the French Parliament has already approved the change. The strikes and protests were aimed at pre-empting the Senate's debate of the amendments, scheduled for October 5.

On September 7, more than 2.5 million workers marched throughout the country as France's largest union groups called a 24-hour strike protesting proposed cuts to their nation's version of Social Security. There were some 220 protests, according to the CGT, the country's leading union federation.

French budget director Eric Woerth cited the possible increase in the retirement age as one of the ways to tackle a spiraling public pension deficit, expected to be €10bn by the end of 2010. Other measures have already been introduced, such as increasing the contribution period from 40 to 41.5 by the end of the decade.

President Sarkozy announced plans earlier this year to tackle the country's growing pension deficit, with estimates predicting it will grow to between €72bn and €115bn by 2050 according to the Conseil d'Orientation des Retraites (COR). COR recently suggested increasing the contribution period to 43.5 years by 2050 for those who wish to draw the maximum state pension.

Even at 62, France would have one of the lowest retirement ages in Europe. Neighboring Germany has decided to bump the retirement age from 65 to 67. The U.S. Social Security system is also gradually raising its retirement age to 67.

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