
Recession reports - French strike nationwide over economic crisis

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It is reported that hundreds of thousands of French workers staged a nationwide strike on Thursday to try to force President Nicolas Sarkozy and business leaders to do more to protect jobs and wages during the economic crisis.

The strike, in a country with a strong protest culture, aimed to highlight fears over growing unemployment, discontent over Sarkozy's reluctance to help consumers and resentment towards bankers blamed for the economic slump.

According to opinion polls, it was the first such protest linked to the slump in a major industrialized nation and was backed by the majority of French voters.

It did not however paralyze activity as past strikes in France have done. The "black Thursday" announced by media beforehand did not quite materialize.

One in three schoolteachers and one in four staffers at the post office and the electricity company EDF walked off the job and participation was high in many parts of the public transport network with erratic train, tram and bus services.

Unions said that the strike cut 11,000 megawatts in power capacity, but EDF said that supplies to customers would not be disrupted. In a rare show of unity, France's eight national unions have drawn up a joint list of demands for the government and companies, which they accuse of trying to use the crisis as a pretext to lay off workers and cut costs.

Mr Francois Chereque head of the moderate CFDT union said that "We need to sound a cry of anger." However, government stability did not seem threatened.

Although France does not face the sort of economic woes that are battering neighbors such as Spain and Britain, its jobless rate is climbing steadily, hitting 2.07 million in November, up 8.5 per cent on the year.

The European Commission predicts a French jobless rate of 9.8 per cent in 2009 and 10.6 per cent in 2010, which would wipe out inroads made in the past few years.

(Sourced from The News)

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