

Strike movement spreads to La Réunion

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In the Indian ocean colony of La Réunion, a coalition headed by trade unions continues to press for an accord similar to those reached in the Caribbean colonies. In recent weeks, the island of 800,000 inhabitants has seen huge demonstrations of up to 35,000 marching in support of their demands. So far, however, ongoing negotiations with representatives of the employers and French government officials have stalled, achieving only a freeze on rents in social housing.

The coalition has called for another massive mobilization on Thursday, March 19 in solidarity with the general strike scheduled for that day in France.

At a mass rally in St-Denis on March 5, Gilles Leperlier, a leader of COSPAR, the organizing coalition, described what it is and what it wants.

“COSPAR,” he said, “is above all a genuine collective, a coalition of trade unions, political organizations and community movements, a coalition without precedent in the recent history of La Réunion. COSPAR is the Collectif des Organisations Syndicales, Politiques et Associatives de La Réunion. It was formed at La Possession on February 5, 2009, and quickly was joined by les forces vives — the bone and sinew — of Réunion society, a total of 45 organizations come together to defend a set of immediate demands and develop, consensually, a platform of demands to end La Réunion’s economic dependency and put an end to the social injustice that prevails.... COSPAR belongs to the Réunionnais and to no one else !”

Leperlier noted that 52% of the population of La Réunion lives below the poverty line, and 24% of the work force is unemployed. COSPAR has advanced 62 specific demands as “an initial basis” for action. It echoes many of the demands, now won, in Guadeloupe and Martinique : an immediate €200 increase in the lowest wages and pensions, the minimum wage and student bursaries ; a 20% reduction in the prices of basic consumer goods ; a freeze on rents and the construction of social housing ; equal wages for women ; taxation of the wealthy (some 800 rich families currently pay no income taxes), etc.

“But the COSPAR sees further,” Leperlier said. “Something is developing in the Overseas Territories (France’s name for its colonies), a vast movement challenging the situations of privilege, a social and political movement that will not stop until the overseas territories have taken in hand their own destiny and put an end to the iniquity of a system that maintains them in economic dependence.”

P.S.

* From Life on the left blog :

<http://lifeonleft.blogspot.com/2009...>