

Anti-Austerity Strike Disrupts Belgium Transportation



Brussels, May 31 (RHC)-- Public sector employees have brought transportation to a halt in Belgium as looming strikes on planes and trains are threatening to bring more chaos to neighboring France.

Thousands of public sector workers took part in a 24-hour national strike across Belgium. The national strike disrupted train and bus services as well as schools, prisons and mail delivery on Tuesday. According to Belgium's state railway, domestic services in the country's French-speaking south ground to a halt.

Trains were still running between London and Brussels, but some services between Brussels and Paris have been cancelled. Forty percent of the trains in the Dutch-speaking north, however, were still providing service. A demonstration, organized by labor unions, was also held in the capital Brussels later in the day.

The unions are striking to protest austerity measures approved by the Belgian government, including budget cuts, changes to working hours and an increase in the retirement age.

In neighboring France, unions are also holding strikes and rallies to pressure the government of President Francois Hollande to withdraw a set of controversial labor reforms. Railway workers disrupted transport throughout France, in a strike that is affecting about half of national and regional train services.

The railway employees strike will be followed by a strike on the Paris Metro network beginning Thursday. Air France pilots have also voted in principle for a lengthy strike at some point in June.

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