

# **After two weeks of mass protests, Guiana Workers 'Toughen Up' Mobilizations Against French State**

Sunday 9 April 2017, by [Telesur](#) (Date first published: 6 April 2017).

**The protesters have been paralyzing the country for over two weeks and remain unsatisfied with the French state's response to the crisis.**

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All flights to French Guiana were canceled Thursday as a wave of national protests against the French government demanding higher wages, an end to insecurity, more jobs and better social services, continue to rock the country.

Workers in Guiana formally approved a "general and unlimited strike" on March 25, about a week after they started paralyzing part of the country's economy.

After "symbolically" occupying central Kourou, a town and district on the Atlantic coast, the Black-run workers' collective "So Guiana Takes Off" warned the French government they will "toughen up" and continue mobilizing until their demands are properly addressed.

The protesters left Kourou's center Wednesday, shortly after the French Council of Ministers approved an emergency plan allocating over US\$1 billion to the territory. The number remains a far cry from the US\$2.5 billion initially demanded by the collective, now raised to US\$3.1.

Meanwhile, the situation in Guiana has reportedly caused tension in the upper echelons of the French government.

French Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve was reportedly "outraged" when Minister for Overseas Departments Ericka Bareigts apologized to the people of Guiana and promised that the French government would address their issues.

"Disastrous apologies disconnected from reality, opening the gates for more demands," Cazeneuve is believed to have said, according to a leak disclosed by investigative newspaper Le Canard Enchaîné.

Considered an "overseas department" of France, French Guiana was colonized by the European country in 1503. Since then, France has denied the colony the same labor and health care rights that those on the mainland enjoy.

**Telesur**

\* Telesur. Published 6 April 2017:

## **Reason Why Guiana's Strikers Blocked Access to Space Satellite**

**Since its colonization in 1503, France has denied Guiana the same labor and health care rights that those on the mainland enjoy**

More than a week after French Guiana workers started a massive strike across the country, a Eutelsat 172B satellite remains unloaded at the Cayenne airport, making its launch scheduled for April 25 unlikely.

The strike, which started more than a week ago but officially paralyzed all sectors starting on Monday, has now affected three launch programs at the Kourou space center, costing about US\$500,000 a day in lost productivity, said a researcher from French space agency CNES, Joel Barre.

The Kourou Space Center, located on the coast, is the main provider of jobs on the French territory, besides the public sector — mostly education jobs — creating a situation of sharp inequalities between state officials and employees from the space center on one hand, and the rest of the population on the other.

The average wage per year is about 44 percent lower than wages in mainland France, while the unemployment rate is twice as high at 22 percent.

As a matter of a fact, the strikers decided to block the road leading to the center first, quickly paralyzing the whole country, as Le Vent Se Leve recalled. Blocking access to the center clearly demonstrated that all the economic activity of Guiana relies heavily on the center.

But other demands quickly followed, like better infrastructures for transport, better security overseeing children going to and from school, and the development of new university courses or professional training — as many Guiana students are forced to study in mainland France, while those who cannot afford it remain unemployed in the South American territory.

Among the 15 to 24-year-old population, about 40 percent are reportedly unemployed, while only half of them are going to school — 10 percent less than mainland France. Only 12 percent passed the baccalaureate and a quarter of them have “difficulties reading” — as opposed to only 4 percent on the mainland.

Out of 250,000 inhabitants, 46,000 don't have direct access to water, and the territory has half of the number of general practitioners that France has. On the other hand, living costs in Guiana are about 12 percent higher than in France, according to official estimates, especially regarding food products, which are 45 percent higher and rent, which is 20 percent higher.

\* Telesur. 29 March 2017:

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Reason-Why-Guianas-Strikers-Blocked-Access-to-Space-Satellite-20170329-0043.html>

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## **Guiana Workers Revolt in France's South American Colony**

**"We, citizens of French Guiana, are tired of living our lives like this," said protest leader Ken Saint-Luce.**

A Black-run worker's organization in French Guiana is leading mass protests against the French government, demanding higher wages and protesting the poor quality of social services.

French Guiana, considered an "overseas department" of France, was colonized by the European country in 1503. Since then, France has denied the colony the same labor and health care rights that those on the mainland enjoy.

"We, citizens of French Guiana, are tired of living our lives like this," the Collective of 500 Brothers spokesperson Ken Saint-Luce told Surinamese radio station Apintie.

"Life over here has become very difficult. We had been talking to the local government for weeks, but that did not lead to anything concrete," he added, referencing labor and social service negotiations that began earlier this year.

The collective, comprised of workers from over 10 industries, forced French-run space station Arien 5 to cancel its planned Thursday launch of a rocket carrying a telecommunications satellite.

Later that day, an Air France flight to Cayenne, the colony's capital, was diverted back to Paris, four hours into its journey, France 24 reported. Passengers were told the flight was returning because of "social unrest."

Since Friday, the collective has blocked roads and closed businesses across the region, calling on Paris to improve living conditions. The French government has responded by sending a delegation of "high-ranking officials" to French Guiana, according to the news station.

"We know Arien 5 is the most important thing here so we're going to intensify our blockade," an unnamed protester told France 24. "We're going to build more road blocks and bring Guiana to a standstill until we get what we want."

French Guiana, with a population of approximately 250,000 people, became a colony for Black slaves after the French exterminated local Indigenous nations. The French used the area to house kidnapped West Africans who were being shipped to Haiti to perform hard labor.

Since then, Paris has used the area to house prisoners from the mainland who are sentenced to forced labor across camps spread along the Atlantic coast. The French government also uses the area to conduct scientific experiments.

Guianan Creole, not French, is the most widely-spoken language in the region.

\* Telesur. Published 25 March 2017:

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Guiana-Workers-Revolt-in-Frances-South-American-Colony-20170325-0015.html>

