

Beat: Politics

## EDOUARD PHILIPPE REAFFIRMS DETERMINATION FACING SNCF STRIKE STILL IN PROGRESS

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY LE PARISIEN

Paris, Washington DC, 08.04.2018, 17:36 Time

**USPA NEWS** - "Everyone must know our determination to go to the end," For the Prime Minister, no question of giving in to the strikers.

The SNCF (french Railways) strike that has lasted for more than ten days is still ongoing and renewable until June 26, 2018. The standoff between the unions and the French government is intensifying. The anger of the crailwaymen is justified by the unions of SNCF, whose 70 proposal in response to the reform of the SNCF by the French government, were refused. Only one TGV out of 5 and 1 out of 3 Transilien circulate this Sunday for the 2nd episode of strike at the SNCF. It's a little less worse than Tuesday and last Wednesday. Monday, however, the movement should resume vigor. According to the General Manager of SNCF Transilien, 43% of the rolling staff declared their intention to strike. We publish the entire interview of the French PM, Edouard Philippe by Le Parisien-Of Sunday, Led by Olivier Beaumont, Valérie Hacot, Muriel Pleyne, Vincent Verier and Henri Vernet Le Parisien SUNDAY, (New Format "France Dimanche)

"Everyone must know our determination to go to the end," stated the French Prime Minister, no question of giving in to the strikers. The SNCF (french Railways) strike that has lasted for more than ten days is still ongoing and renewable until June 26, 2018. The standoff between the unions and the French government is intensifying. The anger of the crailwaymen is justified by the unions of SNCF, whose 70 proposal in response to the reform of the SNCF by the French government, were refused. Only one TGV out of 5 and 1 out of 3 Transilien circulate this Sunday for the 2nd episode of strike at the SNCF. It's a little less worse than Tuesday and last Wednesday. Monday, however, the movement should resume vigor. According to the General Manager of SNCF Transilien, 43% of the rolling staff declared their intention to strike. To express their dissatisfaction with the reform of the SNCF, three railway workers will leave tomorrow, Monday, April 9, for a march of more than 700 kilometers. Leaving Pamiers, Ariège, they plan to reach Paris on May 8, at an average rate of 25 km per day. "We will follow the rail and go to meet railway workers in struggle, but also citizens, French, to explain our working conditions," said one of them, interviewed by France info. The three railway workers have also launched an online petition, "Walk or strike", which they will sign over the steps.

This strike has spread to other sectors, including that of the public service which is advancing to strike for tomorrow Monday, April 9, 2018. In addition, students represented by the UNEF (Union of Students of France) are on strike. At the University of Tolbiac for more than ten days, in Paris, the Tolbiac site of Paris-I has blocked the students who were preparing to take the exams. This university Tolbiac usually hosts between 10,000 and 12,000 students.

Three universities are currently blocked by students protesting against the law on new forms of access to college, which they equate to "selection": Montpellier, Toulouse (see box) and Paris-VIII. At the Paul Valery school in Montpellier, a general assembly of 3,000 students voted at the end of March "an unlimited blockade" until "the repeal of the Vidal law". Many university sites undergo for several days suspension of courses, demonstrations or partial blockages. This is the case in Paris Tolbiac (Pantheon-Sorbonne, Paris-I), Lille, Grenoble, Aix-Marseille, Bordeaux, Limoges, Tours, Nancy, Nice, Lyon-II, Nantes and Dijon. (Source: The Depeche du Nord) Examinations are approaching. According to the facts, they range from late April to late May. "The exams must take place," said Philippe Philippe yesterday on Radio France Inter. Some fear a new move of MAY 68 (Historical general strike of the French Studies fifty years ago). The Prime Minister sent a set of no-pay to strikers who demanded to automatically get the average at their end-of-year exam. The protest movement is gradually spreading to all campuses in the country. The President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron will speak on French Television next Thursday.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW OF EDOUARD PHILIPPE LED BY OLIVIER BEAUMONT- VALERIE HACOT- MURIEL PLEYNET-VINCENT-VERIER- HENRI VERNET FOR LE PARISIEN-DIMANCHE

QUESTION BY LE PARISIEN DIMANCHE :The strike resumed this Saturday night and will end Tuesday morning. Is it leaving for days of hardship for public transport users?

ANSWER EDOUARD PHILIPPE, French PM : I dread it and regret it because I see the very painful character for users who need the train to get around, go to work, see their loved ones ... But just listen to those who thought this strike to understand it is designed to maximize nuisance for users.-----

QUESTION BY LE PARISIEN DIMANCHE : This might prompt you to review your copy?

ANSWER EDOUARD PHILIPPE, French PM : I see that some support this strike, others who criticize it. In any case, I receive messages from French people who support the government, saying that we must go all the way. Well, that's what we're going to do. As early as February 26th, during my first statement on the SNCF, I said that there were topics that were not negotiable: the opening to competition, the reorganization of the company and the end of the recruitment status. We will not come back to that, which does not mean that I am not open to discussing modalities.-----

QUESTION BY LE PARISIEN DIMANCHE : Starting from this postulate, how to get out of this strike, knowing that the unions said they did not want to hear about these points?-----

ANSWER EDOUARD PHILIPPE, French PM : I hear the determination of some unions, but they hear mine too. The status quo is not viable.-----

QUESTION BY LE PARISIEN DIMANCHE :Does this mean that we have started in a balance of power that can last several months?-----

ANSWER EDOUARD PHILIPPE, French PM : I have never used the balance of power theory. But I clearly expressed the government's will and where were the margins of discussion. I am hopeful that in the end we get along. On opening to competition, you often quote the German example. But over there, ticket prices have also gone up ... It depends on what prices we speak and which lines! The German model on which our reform is based is a unified company, a single boss, increased attendance, improved quality of service and an offer that has multiplied with more low prices. SNCF is well worth the Deutsche Bahn. So I remain convinced that with the opening to competition, quality and supply will largely improve.

QUESTION BY LE PARISIEN DIMANCHE : Was there a lack of pedagogy to explain this reform?-----

ANSWER EDOUARD PHILIPPE, French PM : I have absolutely no regrets. But that there is need to explain and continue to explain, it is obvious.

QUESTION BY LE PARISIEN DIMANCHE : So your method is the right one, despite the protest movements?

ANSWER EDOUARD PHILIPPE, French PM : Who could honestly think that if one day we would undertake the real reform of the SNCF, it would necessarily happen without protest? We know that it is a sensitive subject. All the French know it, that's why they tell us to hold on. There is urgency, we must move forward and everyone must know our determination to go to the end. Some suspect you of breaking the status to symbolize the reforming capacity of your government ... It's an extremely politicized reading of the problem. This is not the case. If we were talking about a sector where the quality of service was recognized as rather good, who was not losing money, I would understand that question. The reality is that this is a company where the quality of service is deteriorating, losing a lot of money as we inject more and more, and will be subject to competition. To do nothing is to condemn the enterprise.

QUESTION BY LE PARISIEN DIMANCHE : You ask the railroaders to make efforts for a debt that has been dug by the state. Is it normal ?-----

ANSWER EDOUARD PHILIPPE, French PM : Maybe it takes effort but it is for the general interest. I note that the taxpayer, who heavily funds the SNCF and will continue to do so, has always been there. I do not make a reform against the railwaymen. What interests me is the service we bring to the French. But it is the debt of the State, not that of the railwaymen .. If we take over the debt without doing anything, the SNCF will not get any better. If you want to correct things, you have to act on several factors: the organization of the company, the end of recruitment to status, openness to competition. Then comes the question of debt, but not before having the certainty that the company does not create more than three billion euros of additional debt per year. We want to invest in the SNCF, but we will not continue to abound in something that is not repaired.

QUESTION BY LE PARISIEN DIMANCHE : When are you going to announce a debt recovery?-----

ANSWER EDOUARD PHILIPPE, French PM :This is not a small subject. He will therefore be treated seriously. And we said that the debt issue will be dealt with before the end of the five-year period.

QUESTION BY LE PARISIEN DIMANCHE : Is it not too late ?-----

ANSWER EDOUARD PHILIPPE, French PM :Tell the French that we would take X tens of billions of euros of debt, while nothing would have changed in the company, while no one would be certain that we would not end up ten years later in the same situation, sorry, that would not be reasonable for a public leader. The CGT, and in particular Philippe Martinez, speaks of blackmail ... This is a big word for the representative of an organization that has explicitly designed a strike to be as impactful as possible for users. In the majority, some speak of Agriculture. Do you think France is hard to reform?

It's a term I do not use. For six months, this government has shown that we can change things. But it is natural that there are things that go well and others where there are strikes. What is not acceptable is blocking and illegal actions.

QUESTION BY LE PARISIEN DIMANCHE : Are you satisfied with the work of Elisabeth Borne? (French Minister of Transportation)-----

ANSWER EDOUARD PHILIPPE, French PM : Very satisfied.

QUESTION BY LE PARISIEN DIMANCHE : Even though the unions went out furiously Friday from his office and threatened a longer

strike?-----

ANSWER EDOUARD PHILIPPE, French PM :I told you, I do not walk to the balance of power. For a government, dialogue does not mean giving up.

QUESTION BY LE PARISIEN DIMANCHE : Is there a convergence of struggles?-----

ANSWER EDOUARD PHILIPPE, French PM :I find it difficult to see a convergence between far-left activists who disrupt lecture halls and carers in hospitals. I have trouble seeing the convergence between those opposed to rail reform and Air France employees who demand higher wages. These are not the same goals. Now, I have seen that a certain number of people, out of political and ideological conviction, are trying to fight in the street against the results that have been obtained in the polls. This is what Olivier Besancenot said almost explicitly and sometimes what Jean-Luc Mélenchon said. TO be continued on next article the rest of the Exclusive interview of French OM, Edouard Philippe By Le Parisian Dimanche

**Article online:**

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