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## **Strikes over pensions cause chaos in France**

<http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/1009/100908-pension.html>

### **Contents**

|                            |    |
|----------------------------|----|
| The Article                | 2  |
| Warm-ups                   | 3  |
| Before Reading / Listening | 4  |
| While Reading / Listening  | 5  |
| Listening Gap Fill         | 6  |
| After Reading / Listening  | 7  |
| Student Survey             | 8  |
| Discussion                 | 9  |
| Language Work              | 10 |
| Writing                    | 11 |
| Homework                   | 12 |
| Answers                    | 13 |

8th September, 2010

# THE ARTICLE

From <http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1009/100908-pension.html>

Striking public workers brought cities across France to a halt on September the 7th. Thousands of people in over 200 cities went on strike to protest against the government's plans to reform the country's pension system. Union bosses said over two million people marched in the streets. Among those downing tools were teachers, postal workers and nurses. They were also joined by private sector workers, including airline staff and bank clerks. The French have one of the most generous state pensions in the world, but officials said it is too costly and they need to make savings. The most controversial plan to cut costs is to raise the retirement age from 60 to 62 by the year 2018. French president Nicholas Sarkozy hopes his reforms will become law next month.

French officials believe raising the retirement age by two years will create savings of 100 billion euros by 2030. French political leader Jean-Francois Cope supported Mr Sarkozy's plans to make sure deficits in the pension system did not damage the French economy. He told 'Le Figaro' newspaper, "all the reports conclude we're heading to this dead end". He reminded the French people that many other European countries have already raised their retirement age. In Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Spain people do not receive a state pension until they are 67. Even if French people retired at 62, that is still below the average of 64 in richer nations. Henda Fersi, a passenger at a Lyon train station did not agree with the strike, saying: "I'm just getting tired of this because this is not the first time."

# WARM-UPS

**1. PENSIONS:** Walk around the class and talk to other students about pensions. Change partners often. Sit with your first partner(s) and share your findings.

**2. CHAT:** In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

*striking workers / protests / reform / postal workers / private sector / savings / costs / retirement age / deficits / economy / dead end / retired / average / passengers*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

**3. PROTEST:** What's best? Complete this table with your partner(s). Change partners and share what you wrote. Change and share again.

| Kind of protest      | How effective? | (How) Would you do this? |
|----------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| Strike (down tools)  |                |                          |
| Boycott goods        |                |                          |
| March in the streets |                |                          |
| Write letters        |                |                          |
| Go on hunger strike  |                |                          |
| Riot                 |                |                          |

**4. RETIREMENT AGE:** Students A **strongly** believe the retirement age should be 70; Students B **strongly** believe it should be 55. Change partners again and talk about your conversations.

**5. RETIRED:** Rank these retirement activities and share your rankings with your partner. Put the best at the top. Change partners and share your rankings again.

- Put family pics online
- Gardening
- Watch TV
- Do charity / voluntary work
- Cook
- Watch TV
- Travel
- Start your own business

**6. STRIKE:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word 'strike'. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

# BEFORE READING / LISTENING

From <http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1009/100908-pension.html>

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Read the headline. Guess if a-h below are true (T) or false (F).

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| a. Everyone in France stopped working to go on strike for a day.           | T / F |
| b. People are striking because France wants to tax guest houses.           | T / F |
| c. Workers from the private and public sectors downed tools for the day.   | T / F |
| d. France wants to increase the retirement age by 2 years by 2018.         | T / F |
| e. Raising the retirement age could save France 100 billion euros a year.  | T / F |
| f. A politician warned the pension system would damage the economy.        | T / F |
| g. People in Germany retire at a later age than those in Spain.            | T / F |
| h. A train passenger said she fully supported the striking French workers. | T / F |

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article.

- |                  |                    |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 1. halt          | a. kind            |
| 2. protest       | b. going on strike |
| 3. downing tools | c. mean            |
| 4. generous      | d. make            |
| 5. reform        | e. judge           |
| 6. create        | f. standstill      |
| 7. deficits      | g. march           |
| 8. conclude      | h. see eye to eye  |
| 9. average       | i. improve         |
| 10. agree        | j. shortfalls      |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** (Sometimes more than one choice is possible.)

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. workers brought cities across France  | a. pension system        |
| 2. people in over 200 cities went        | b. until they are 67     |
| 3. reform the country's                  | c. age by two years      |
| 4. Among those downing                   | d. on strike to protest  |
| 5. his reforms will                      | e. end                   |
| 6. raising the retirement                | f. to a halt             |
| 7. we're heading to this dead            | g. tired of this         |
| 8. people do not receive a state pension | h. of 64                 |
| 9. still below the average               | i. tools were teachers   |
| 10. I'm just getting                     | j. become law next month |

# WHILE READING / LISTENING

From <http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1009/100908-pension.html>

**GAP FILL:** Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Striking public workers brought cities across France to a \_\_\_\_\_ on September the 7th. Thousands of people in over 200 cities went on strike to \_\_\_\_\_ against the government's plans to reform the country's pension system. Union bosses said over two million people \_\_\_\_\_ in the streets. Among those downing \_\_\_\_\_ were teachers, postal workers and nurses. They were also joined by private sector workers, including airline staff and bank \_\_\_\_\_. The French have one of the most \_\_\_\_\_ state pensions in the world, but officials said it is too costly and they need to make \_\_\_\_\_. The most controversial plan to cut costs is to raise the retirement age from 60 to 62 by the year 2018. French president Nicholas Sarkozy hopes his \_\_\_\_\_ will become law next month.

*generous*  
*marched*  
*savings*  
*clerks*  
*halt*  
*reforms*  
*protest*  
*tools*

French officials believe \_\_\_\_\_ the retirement age by two years will create savings of 100 billion euros by 2030. French political leader Jean-Francois Cope supported Mr Sarkozy's plans to make sure \_\_\_\_\_ in the pension system did not \_\_\_\_\_ the French economy. He told 'Le Figaro' newspaper, "all the reports conclude we're heading to this \_\_\_\_\_ end". He reminded the French people that many other European countries have already \_\_\_\_\_ their retirement age. In Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Spain people do not receive a state pension until they are 67. Even if French people retired at 62, that is still below the \_\_\_\_\_ of 64 in richer nations. Henda Fersi, a passenger at a Lyon train station did not \_\_\_\_\_ with the strike, saying: "I'm just getting \_\_\_\_\_ of this because this is not the first time."

*dead*  
*deficits*  
*tired*  
*average*  
*raising*  
*agree*  
*damage*  
*raised*

## LISTENING – Listen and fill in the gaps

From <http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1009/100908-pension.html>

Striking \_\_\_\_\_ across France to a halt on September the 7th. Thousands of people in over 200 cities \_\_\_\_\_ against the government's plans to reform the country's pension system. Union bosses said over two million people marched in the streets. Among \_\_\_\_\_ teachers, postal workers and nurses. They were also joined by private sector workers, including airline staff and bank clerks. The French have one of the most \_\_\_\_\_ the world, but officials said it is too costly and they need to make savings. The most controversial \_\_\_\_\_ raise the retirement age from 60 to 62 by the year 2018. French president Nicholas Sarkozy \_\_\_\_\_ law next month.

French officials believe \_\_\_\_\_ by two years will create savings of 100 billion euros by 2030. French political leader Jean-Francois Cope supported Mr Sarkozy's plans \_\_\_\_\_ the pension system did not damage the French economy. He told 'Le Figaro' newspaper, "all the reports conclude we're \_\_\_\_\_". He reminded the French people that many other European countries have already raised their retirement age. In Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Spain people \_\_\_\_\_ pension until they are 67. Even if French people retired at 62, that is \_\_\_\_\_ 64 in richer nations. Henda Fersi, a passenger at a Lyon train station did not agree with the strike, saying: "I'm \_\_\_\_\_ because this is not the first time."

# AFTER READING / LISTENING

From <http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1009/100908-pension.html>

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionary / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'public' and 'worker'.

| public | worker |
|--------|--------|
|        |        |

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. GAP FILL:** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall how they were used in the text:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• halt</li><li>• plans</li><li>• tools</li><li>• joined</li><li>• savings</li><li>• law</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 100 billion</li><li>• damage</li><li>• dead</li><li>• already</li><li>• 64</li><li>• tired</li></ul> |
|---|--|

# STUDENT PENSIONS SURVEY

From <http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1009/100908-pension.html>

Write five GOOD questions about pensions in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper. When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

|      | STUDENT 1<br>_____ | STUDENT 2<br>_____ | STUDENT 3<br>_____ |
|------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Q.1. |                    |                    |                    |
| Q.2. |                    |                    |                    |
| Q.3. |                    |                    |                    |
| Q.4. |                    |                    |                    |
| Q.5. |                    |                    |                    |

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.



# PENSIONS DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
- b) What springs to mind when you hear the word 'pension'?
- c) What are you doing about your pension?
- d) Why are pensions important?
- e) Would you ever go on strike or march through the streets?
- f) What do you think of the government's plans?
- g) What is the best age to retire?
- h) Do public or private sector workers cause more trouble when they go on strike?
- i) What kind of pension is there in your country?
- j) Why is the French government's pensions plan controversial?

*Strikes over pensions cause chaos in France – 8th September, 2010*  
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# PENSIONS DISCUSSION

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) Is it OK to raise the retirement age to save the country money?
- c) What is the 'dead end' one politician believes France is heading to?
- d) Should the retirement age be raised now we're living longer?
- e) Do you agree with the striking workers?
- f) What will you do in your retirement?
- g) Do you think your pension will be enough to live comfortably?
- h) Do you agree with people going on strike?
- i) What do you think of the idea of the state not providing a pension?
- j) What questions would you like to ask French president Nicholas Sarkozy?

# LANGUAGE – MULTIPLE CHOICE

From <http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1009/100908-pension.html>

Striking public workers brought cities across France to a (1) \_\_\_\_\_ on September the 7th. Thousands of people in over 200 cities went (2) \_\_\_\_\_ strike to protest against the government's plans to reform the country's pension system. Union bosses said over two million people marched in the streets. Among those (3) \_\_\_\_\_ tools were teachers, postal workers and nurses. They were also joined by private sector workers, (4) \_\_\_\_\_ airline staff and bank clerks. The French have one of the most generous state pensions in the world, but officials said it is too (5) \_\_\_\_\_ and they need to (6) \_\_\_\_\_ savings. The most controversial plan to cut costs is to raise the retirement age from 60 to 62 by the year 2018. French president Nicholas Sarkozy hopes his reforms will become law next month.

French (7) \_\_\_\_\_ believe raising the retirement age by two years will create savings of 100 billion euros by 2030. French political leader Jean-Francois Cope supported Mr Sarkozy's plans to make sure deficits (8) \_\_\_\_\_ the pension system did not damage the French economy. He told 'Le Figaro' newspaper, "all the reports conclude we're heading to this (9) \_\_\_\_\_ end". He (10) \_\_\_\_\_ the French people that many other European countries have already raised their retirement age. In Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Spain people do not receive a state pension until they are 67. Even if French people retired at 62, that is still below the (11) \_\_\_\_\_ of 64 in richer nations. Henda Fersi, a passenger at a Lyon train station did not agree with the strike, saying: "I'm just getting (12) \_\_\_\_\_ of this because this is not the first time."

## Put the correct words from the table below in the above article.

- |     |               |                |               |              |
|-----|---------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| 1.  | (a) bolt      | (b) felt       | (c) stilt     | (d) halt     |
| 2.  | (a) at        | (b) on         | (c) in        | (d) at       |
| 3.  | (a) downing   | (b) down       | (c) downer    | (d) downs    |
| 4.  | (a) inclusion | (b) inclusive  | (c) including | (d) include  |
| 5.  | (a) costs     | (b) costed     | (c) costly    | (d) cost     |
| 6.  | (a) do        | (b) make       | (c) be        | (d) buy      |
| 7.  | (a) officials | (b) officially | (c) official  | (d) office   |
| 8.  | (a) by        | (b) at         | (c) to        | (d) in       |
| 9.  | (a) died      | (b) dead       | (c) death     | (d) dying    |
| 10. | (a) remainder | (b) memorized  | (c) remained  | (d) reminded |
| 11. | (a) avenge    | (b) avert      | (c) average   | (d) avenue   |
| 12. | (a) tired     | (b) tiresome   | (c) tiring    | (d) tire     |



# HOMework

**1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

**2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find out more about the strikes in France. Share what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

**3. PENSIONS:** Make a poster about pensions. Show your work to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all have similar things?

**4. RETIRED:** Write a magazine article about a pensioner. Include imaginary interviews with him/her about life on a pension and the government minister who sets the retirement age and pension level.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down any new words and expressions you hear from your partner(s).

**5. LETTER:** Write a letter to a pensioner. Ask him/her three questions about his/her pension. Give him/her three pieces of advice on how to stretch his/her money. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

# ANSWERS

## TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F      b. F      c. T      d. T      e. F      f. T      g. F      h. F

## SYNONYM MATCH:

- |                  |                    |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 1. halt          | a. standstill      |
| 2. protest       | b. march           |
| 3. downing tools | c. going on strike |
| 4. generous      | d. kind            |
| 5. reform        | e. improve         |
| 6. create        | f. make            |
| 7. deficits      | g. shortfalls      |
| 8. conclude      | h. judge           |
| 9. average       | i. mean            |
| 10. agree        | j. see eye to eye  |

## PHRASE MATCH:

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. workers brought cities across France  | a. to a halt             |
| 2. people in over 200 cities went        | b. on strike to protest  |
| 3. reform the country's                  | c. pension system        |
| 4. Among those downing                   | d. tools were teachers   |
| 5. his reforms will                      | e. become law next month |
| 6. raising the retirement                | f. age by two years      |
| 7. we're heading to this dead            | g. end                   |
| 8. people do not receive a state pension | h. until they are 67     |
| 9. still below the average               | i. of 64                 |
| 10. I'm just getting                     | j. tired of this         |

## GAP FILL:

### Strikes over pensions cause chaos in France

Striking public workers brought cities across France to a **halt** on September the 7th. Thousands of people in over 200 cities went on strike to **protest** against the government's plans to reform the country's pension system. Union bosses said over two million people **marched** in the streets. Among those downing **tools** were teachers, postal workers and nurses. They were also joined by private sector workers, including airline staff and bank **clerks**. The French have one of the most **generous** state pensions in the world, but officials said it is too costly and they need to make **savings**. The most controversial plan to cut costs is to raise the retirement age from 60 to 62 by the year 2018. French president Nicholas Sarkozy hopes his **reforms** will become law next month.

French officials believe **raising** the retirement age by two years will create savings of 100 billion euros by 2030. French political leader Jean-Francois Cope supported Mr Sarkozy's plans to make sure **deficits** in the pension system did not **damage** the French economy. He told 'Le Figaro' newspaper, "all the reports conclude we're heading to this **dead** end". He reminded the French people that many other European countries have already **raised** their retirement age. In Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Spain people do not receive a state pension until they are 67. Even if French people retired at 62, that is still below the **average** of 64 in richer nations. Henda Fersi, a passenger at a Lyon train station did not **agree** with the strike, saying: "I'm just getting **tired** of this because this is not the first time."

## LANGUAGE WORK

- 1 - d    2 - b    3 - a    4 - c    5 - c    6 - b    7 - a    8 - d    9 - b    10 - d    11 - c    12 - a