Easy Access English

The French Welfare State



Activity One – Match the words with their definitions.

Healthcare	**To employ someone.**
Injury	**Advantages**
Allowances	**To put under pressure**
Unemployment	**Even though**
Benefits	**To be hurt.**
Impediment	**System to provide medical help for people in ill health.**
Hiring	**Obstacle**
Sickness	**To be forced to.**
Strain	**A certain sum of money to cover expenses.**
Despite	**To have no job.**
Enforced	**To fall ill**

Activity Two – Read the article and answers the comprehension questions, which follow.

The French social security system explained *Written by David Hampshire*

France has a comprehensive social security (sécurité sociale) system covering **healthcare**, **injuries** at work, family **allowances**, **unemployment** insurance, and pensions, invalidity and death **benefits**. France spends more on 'welfare' than almost any other EU country: over 30 per cent of GDP.

Total social security revenue is around E200 billion per year and the social security budget is higher than the gross national product (GNP), i.e. social security costs more than the value of what the country produces. Not surprisingly, social security payments are among the highest in the EU. Total contributions per employee (too around 15 funds) average around 60 per cent of gross pay, some 60 per cent of what is paid by employers (an **impediment** to **hiring** staff). The self-employed must pay the full amount (an impediment to self-employment!) However, with the exception of **sickness** benefits, social security benefits aren't taxed; indeed they're deducted from your taxable income. The public has been highly resistant to any change that might reduce benefits, while employers are pushing to have their contributions lowered.

Despite the high contributions, the French social security system is under severe financial **strain** due to an ageing population, which has contributed to a huge increase in spending on healthcare, pensions and unemployment benefits in recent years (France's health spending alone is around 10 per cent of its GNP - the highest of social security debt by 31st January 2009. Measures introduced recently include an **enforced** employee contribution towards 'the reimbursement of the social debt').

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Questions -

1. How much does France spend on welfare?
2. What does the welfare system cover?
3. Does the French welfare system pay out money to the families of workers who die?
4. Which is higher, the gros national product or the social security budget in France?
5. What percentage of salaries do employers in France have to pay in social charges?
6. Do French people want the system to change?
7. What is putting pressure on the French welfare system?
8. What measures have been taken to solve the problem?

Activity Three – Review the expressions for expressing your opinion and agreeing and disagreeing.

Giving your opinion neutrally

"I think…"

"I feel that…"

"In my opinion…"

"As far as I'm concerned…"

"As I see it…"

"In my view…"

"I tend to think that…"

Giving a strong opinion

"I'm absolutely convinced that…"

"I'm sure that…"

"I strongly believe that…"

"I have no doubt that…"

Expressions for asking someone's opinion

"What do you think?"

"What's your view?"

"How do you see the situation?"

Expressing agreement

I couldn't agree more
That's so true.
Absolutely.
That's exactly how I feel.
Exactly.
No doubt about it.
You have a point there.

Expressing disagreement

I'm afraid I disagree.
(Strong) I totally disagree.
(Strong) I'd say the exact opposite.
Not necessarily.
That's not always true.
That's not always the case.
No, I'm not so sure about that.

Activity Four – Express your opinion on the following points:

1. The social charges in France are prohibitively high and mean that it is very difficult for small businesses to succeed and it is also off-putting to employ people.

2. The welfare system in France means that people are so assisted by the government in every way that they have very little incentive to work and may as well just stay at home.

3. The welfare system in France is going to ruin the country and is already crippling the economy.

4. The welfare system in France keeps the rich wealthy and the ordinary man in the street in his place.

5. France is a country where people are taken care of and have all the benefits of an excellent healthcare system and the best medical facilities in the world.

6. France takes care of all of its citizens thanks to its great welfare system.

Activity Five – Review the Conditional.

Activity Six – Using the conditional say what you would do, what systems or new laws you would put in place, and what changes you would make to the French welfare state if you were in power.



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