

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

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British teachers union rejects government pay recommendation

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) this week rejected the government's pay proposal of a 3.5 percent pay increase for classroom teachers. The union has called for an increase of around 4.7 percent.

General Secretary Peter Smith said the rise proposed by the School Teachers' Pay Review was "fundamentally unfair" and that "all teachers deserve a decent pay boost. Government spin-doctoring will not help to motivate and retain existing teachers, nor will it ease the recruitment crisis."

The review links pay to performance. A survey of 974 Head teachers and deputies last week found an overwhelmingly majority opposed.

Miners in Britain vote to strike for increase in wages

On March 2, members of the National Union of Mineworkers voted to take strike action to demand an increase in pay from RJB Mining, the largest coal producer in the UK. A 57 percent majority voted for industrial action. The union has set March 14 as the date to begin the strike.

RJB said that it had improved its pay offer in the period since the NUM ballot was held and had written to the union with details. Two weeks ago, RJB negotiated a pay deal with the Union of Democratic Mineworkers after its members voted to strike. The UDM was formed during the 1984-85 national miner's strike as a strikebreaking organisation.

Hungarian protest to demand pay increase

On March 6, Hungarian Interior Ministry employees protested outside the Parliament building in Budapest to demand a pay increase. The workers, members of five public sector unions, demonstrated following a failure in talks between the government and their trade unions. They are calling for a pay increase of five percent.

Those demonstrating included 2,000 police officers, border guards and other civil service employees from cities and towns throughout Hungary. Judit Bardos, the secretary of the Interior Affairs Workers' Union, threatened a strike if the government did not meet the demands of the unions. A

further protest is planned for March 13.

Nuclear power workers in the Ukraine threaten strike to demand wage arrears payment

Workers at five nuclear plants in the Ukraine, including Chernobyl, have threatened to strike if a dispute over unpaid wages is not resolved. The workers had set a deadline of March 6 for the state nuclear company, Energoatom, to pay wage arrears. A new deadline of March 22 has been set.

Unpaid wages have reached the equivalent of \$US15 million. The crisis in the nuclear sector in the Ukraine, the location of the world's worst nuclear power disaster in 1986, poses serious safety concerns. Workers have warned that the non-payment of wages threatens the safety of millions of people.

The strike threat was issued by the Atom Trade Union (ATU). In Slavutych, some 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of the capital, Kiev, 1,500 workers from the local nuclear station held a rally. Olexiy Lych, the leader of the united trade unions of Energoatom, said, "A decision was adopted on March 4 to launch a strike starting March 22."

The General Secretary of the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions, to which the ATU is affiliated, said, "Non-payment of any group of workers is wholly unacceptable. In the case of nuclear workers, it also poses a threat to the wider national and global community. Workers are a key factor in nuclear safety. They have to remain fully alert throughout their shifts. Nuclear workers who have serious financial worries, and who may have to take second jobs out of hours in order to make ends meet, could experience difficulty in concentrating".

Finnish air traffic control dispute ends

A strike by Finnish air traffic controllers over pay was ended on March 8 following a settlement with the government. The strike lasted for five weeks, disrupting many domestic flights and grounding one in five international flights.

The strike involved 250 air traffic controllers who demanded a pay increase of more than 20 percent. Management originally said they would not grant pay rises of any more than 11 percent. On March 8, the Air Traffic Controllers Union and the Civil Aviation Authority agreed

to a four-year wage agreement, with a pay increase of 13 percent during the first three years.

Israeli port workers pay strike settled

The ten-day strike by workers at Israel's ports ended on March 8, after unions and management agreed an interim settlement. Port staff will receive an immediate 4.5 percent pay increase, pending a comprehensive deal to be finalised at a later date. The agreement was reached after the head of the Histadrut labour federation agreed to mediate in the dispute.

On the day the deal was announced, Dan Gillerman, the president of the Federation of the Israeli Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said his organisation was preparing to sue the port workers union. Stating that the strike had cost exporters 30 million shekels (\$7.5m) per day, he continued, "Only a little more than a month ago, the customs workers strike ended, which cost 100 million shekels in damages. And now, during this critical time of recession and unemployment, the business sector has to contend with additional sanctions, this time by the port workers."

South African farm workers strike ends

Labourers at Laughing Waters farm near Malelane in Mpumalanga, South Africa, ended their two-week strike last weekend. The deal was endorsed by the South African Agricultural Plantation and Allied Workers Union (SAAPAWU).

The labourers will receive a pay increase of R3.55 (\$0.60) a day for those employed at the farm since July 30, 1997, those employed between August 1, 1997 and July 30, 1998 get just R2.55. Those hired after August 1, 1998, receive no increase at all.

The provision of protective clothing in handling dangerous insecticide sprays for crops of bananas, sugar cane and mangoes was dealt with in a similar manner. Labourers with less than 9 months' employment at the farm will not be provided with protective clothing, while the rest of the workforce will get gumboots, overalls and raincoats but no gloves.

The strike began when the farm labourers put in for a wage increase of R20 a day and the management offered R1.10. The provincial secretary of SAAPAWU, Lawrence Mooi said he believed it was illegal to have workers spraying crops with insecticide without protective clothing.

Brutal conditions at Del Monte's farm in South Africa

Labourers from the age of 13 up to those in their mid seventies are employed on Del Monte's dairy and manure farm at Blackheath, South Africa on wage rates as low as R35 (\$60) a week. Joseph Benjamin from the Centre for Rural Studies said, "This is the worst farm I have ever seen". He noted conditions such as workers living in derelict buildings with whole families living in one room, no running

water, no electricity, and regular beatings by the owner.

Justifying his action, the farm owner Mr Prins said, "They break everything. They're not suited for a house. They're used to outside. If they complain they want more money, then it stands them free to leave whenever they want".

One of the workers, Jacob Fortuin, who had worked for Del Monte for seven years said, "Yes I am afraid of him because I have been beaten regularly by Prins for no apparent reason." Another worker, 74 year old John Carstons said, "He slapped me the other day because a cow died during the night", and concluded by saying, "we have to live here. What can we do?"

The Centre for Rural Legal Studies intends to complain about Prin's use of child labour, but others who had laid charges before said nothing had come of them.

Workers Strike at Toyota, South Africa

Two hundred workers at the Toyota paint and body shops struck for a third day, halting production of around 300 cars a day, on Wednesday March 3. The workers, members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), walked out of the Durban car assembly plant demanding the payment of their profit related bonuses.

Harry Gazendam, the spokesman for Toyota South Africa, said, "This situation affects about 1,500 people who have had to go and stay home with no pay. The rest of the other divisions are working normally doing other things". Gazendam went on to say, " This action is totally illegal, the labour court has now interdicted it, its contrary to agreements with NUMSA (agreements on profit targets) and in terms of the interdict we can right now fire the workers on strike."



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