

Workers Struggles: Europe, the Middle East and Africa

17 September 1999

Toolmakers strike at Ford plant in Dagenham, England

In a dispute over allowances, 400 toolmakers at the Ford auto plant in Dagenham, England struck for 24 hours September 14. They were joined by other workers at a supply factory in North London. The workers are represented by the AEEU engineering union.

Negotiations for a new Ford contract are currently under way between the company and several unions. The unions involved, including the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), are calling for a cut in the workweek and a "significant" pay increase.

Postal workers in Scotland strike

On September 9 and 10, 280 postal workers in the West Lothian area of Scotland took unofficial strike action. The workers, members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU), walked out in protest of the dismissal of a colleague who had been accused of wilful delay of mail. The strike resulted in the non-delivery of a quarter of a million pieces of mail in the towns of Livingston, Bathgate, Bo'ness, Broxburn and Linlithgow.

Irish bus drivers walkout prevented by union—train drivers, catering staff set to strike

The union representing bus drivers in Dublin, Ireland agreed to postpone a one-day strike planned for September 16. The National Busworkers Union postponed the strike over a pay increase and agreed to begin talks with the Labour Court. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) had called on the Labour Court to intervene in the dispute. It is expected that the Labour Court will propose an increase in basic pay from the present maximum of £280 a week to £300, as well as an increase of the lead-in payments from £1,400 to £1,700. The court is also proposing compensation of up to two years' salary for drivers whose incomes drop as a result of new rosters.

Meanwhile, train drivers who operate the DART services from Dublin are set to strike after talks broke down between their union and the train company, Iarnród fireann. In a long-running dispute, Iarnród fireann has announced that it will introduce trainee drivers to the DART service later this

month, as part of the plan to extend its services to Greystones and Malahide. Train drivers have threatened to take indefinite strike action if this happens.

Catering staff at four hospitals in Dublin have threatened strike action next week to demand an increase in pay. The main issue in the dispute is pay for 30 catering supervisors, who have stated that their salaries are being held back. The first strike is to begin on September 20 and will last for 24 hours. The workers are employed at the St James's, St Vincent's, the Mater and Beaumont hospitals. Commenting on the dispute, the health services branch secretary of the SIPTU union said, "Supervisors are at the end of their tethers. They have been stuck since 1994 and negotiations have dragged on for the past 15 months with no progress."

Israeli municipal workers end strike

A nine-day strike by municipal garbage workers in Israel ended on September 9. The workers had struck to demand a 4.8 percent increase and this was agreed to in negotiations with management. As a result of the strike, all the main towns and cities have seen an accumulation of huge rubbish piles that are estimated to weigh 100,000 tonnes. It was expected that the rubbish would not be cleared until the middle of this week.

Nigerian university teachers go on strike

Nigeria's main university teachers' union began an open-ended strike last Monday to demand better conditions. The teachers, members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities, demanded that President Obasanjo carry out the improvements agreed to in May by the then military government. They are also demanding continued negotiations on funding, salaries and academic freedom.

Nigerian university teachers have carried out numerous strikes against the decline of conditions and low levels of funding by successive governments. President Obasanjo made the improvement of education one of his key pledges when he took office in May after 15 years of military rule.

South African public service unions threaten to resume strikes

South African public service unions have agreed on a strategy that may include a month-long strike by civil

servants, combined with sympathy strikes in the private sector.

Last week the 12 unions declared they were engaged in a socio-economic dispute under the terms of the Labour Relations Act, after Public Service and Administration Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi ended talks on the eight-month-old conflict. She claimed that the state did not have the money to improve its pay offer of 7 percent for teachers and the lowest paid workers, and 6.3 percent for the bulk of civil servants. The unions were caught off guard when she declared the talks were at an end.

The unions are demanding a 7.3 percent pay rise for public workers and an 8.3 percent increase for teachers. Thousands of public servants struck for one day in major cities last month, in the first action that involved all 12 public service unions. The unions are still encouraging bargaining council president Edwin Molhlegi to continue his search for a resolution of the dispute.

South African office workers begin dispute

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu) has begun a dispute with the South African Revenue Service (Sars) over its "unilateral implementation of a new grading system", Nehawu said last weekend.

New entrants to Sars will now start at a lower salary, while existing employees will get no increases. The development of the new grading system was a joint exercise between Sars, Nehawu and the Public Service Association. Now that the plans are being put into action, Nehawu is protesting.

Construction workers strike in Mozambique

Over 600 workers from the Portuguese-owned construction company Tamega, which repairs roads in Mozambique, have been on strike for 10 days, demanding the removal of the company's personnel manager. The union accuses the manager of unfairly dismissing many workers, since he joined the firm about two months ago.

The company's director denounced the strike as illegal "because it is not in accordance with the labour law, and also because the workers did not talk to the company management to put their case before taking this decision."

Taxi drivers on strike in Cameroon

A taxi drivers strike in Yaounde and Douala delayed thousands of commuters in Cameroon's two major cities September 6. The drivers were angered by the decision of the national petroleum refining company to increase petrol prices from 389 CFA francs (US\$0.64) a litre to 424 francs (US\$0.70). Besides the fuel price increase, taxi drivers bitterly complain about too many taxes, and the large number of police and gendarme checkpoints around the towns and cities, where policemen openly demand money from the drivers.

The decision to strike was carried unanimously during a

meeting held in Yaounde by members of the Syndicate for Employed Taxi Drivers of Cameroon. The strike action coincided with the start of the 1999/2000 academic year, forcing pupils, students and teachers to stay at home.

Students boycott classes in Ghana

Students have begun an indefinite boycott of lectures to put pressure on the government to release 13 billion in Ghanaian cedis (US\$4.9 million) for academic programmes in 1999.

The government announced in August that it had established a 3 billion cedi (US\$1.1 million) Tertiary Education Bursary Fund to cater for needy students who cannot afford to pay new fees announced by the university authorities. The students have rejected the offer, saying the amount is woefully inadequate for the universities to run their programmes and that the fund is prone to questionable disbursement.

The University Teachers Association of Ghana has expressed concern about the "atmosphere" prevailing at the University of Ghana and supported the university's position against that of the students. The association advised students to attend lectures regularly for their own interest. "We hope the unpleasant situation on campus will be resolved within the shortest possible time," it said.

Kenyan teachers renew strike threat

Teachers in Nairobi plan to boycott the national examinations if the government fails to implement phases two and three of their salary increment. The leader of their union, the KNUT, said the government should look at the union as a stakeholder in the country's education sector and not as an enemy. He pointed out the high number of teachers dying daily in the countryside due to poor living conditions, and asked the government to provide relief food to teachers in semi-arid areas.



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