

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

30 September 1999

Workers in Slovakia protest welfare spending cuts

On September 26, 40,000 workers demonstrated in the Slovak capital of Bratislava, protesting the government's budget-cutting measures. In July, the government increased taxes and brought in austerity measures aimed at cutting welfare spending by 6 billion Slovak korunas (US\$145.5 million) in welfare payments by the end of the year. The government is introducing the cuts in an attempt to stabilise the currency and enable it to meet the criteria for entering the European Union.

The protest was called by a number of trade unions, who said that every worker in the country would be worse off because of the cuts. The unions have called on the government to begin negotiations within two weeks or face further unrest. The government has rejected these demands. Finance Minister Brgitta Schmoegnerova said the demands would cost Sk 19 billion (US\$458 million), and that these funds "were not available right now".

Portuguese port workers strike over working conditions

Dockworkers at several Portuguese ports took strike action on September 24 to protest working conditions. Port workers struck at Leixoes and Aveiro in the north-west of the country and at ports in the mid-Atlantic Portuguese islands of Madeira and the Azores. The port at the capital city of Lisbon was not struck, but the Port Workers Union said that if the dispute with the government were not resolved, there would be a strike of that port on November 29.

The strike hit the loading and discharging of cargo from 15 vessels at Leixoes, which serves the city of Oporto. The president of the Port Workers Union, Antonio Reis, said, "We are striking because of a dispute with the government over working conditions. This stoppage has nothing to do with wages."

Strike ballot set for UK electricity workers

Workers at Northern Electric are to be balloted for

strike action after the company announced plans to make 500 employees redundant. Northern Electric announced the redundancies on September 1. The strike ballot has been called by the Engineers & Managers Union.

The company, which employs 1,800 people, is owned by the Mid American Energy Holdings Co. in the United States. Mid American said that the job losses were as a result of the British energy regulator OFGEM's demand that UK electricity companies cut distribution charges. Northern Electric, which is based in north-east England, faces a reduction in distribution prices of 26 to 31 percent.

Doctors balloted for strike action at two Dublin hospitals

Last week, doctors at the Mater hospital in Dublin, Ireland were balloted for strike action in a dispute about unpaid overtime pay. The doctors were anticipated to support a call for industrial action and the strike is expected to take place in the second week of October. The result of the ballot will be known at the end of this week. Were the strike to go ahead it would be just one week before the threatened national nurses' strike.

The doctors are demanding payment of £250,000 in overtime, some of it due for over two years. Non-consultant hospital doctors in St. Colmcille's, Loughlinstown, Co Dublin, are also presently being balloted for strike action on local issues, including poor accommodation. Mater and St. Colmcille's are the two major acute hospitals in the city.

Luska council to lay off workers

Chingola Municipal Council is to lay off 35 percent of its work force as part of a restructuring programme. The plan has been submitted to the Zambian Ministry of Local Government and Housing for it to decide source funding. Councils have been incorporated into a public service reform programme that is being implemented throughout government departments.

Zambian textile workers dismissed

Mulungushi Textiles announced that they had terminated the contracts of 24 workers in the midst of negotiations with the National Union of Commercial and Industrial Workers (NUCIW). General Secretary Tedson Msoni said the layoffs were part of a growing trend by investors to breach labour laws. The NUCIW complained that they had not been informed of the dismissals in advance. "Investors are now dismissing people at will and this does not augur well," Msoni said. Earlier Lyons in Ndola had retrenched 56 workers as part of a restructuring plan, but said that the union had been informed of the layoffs, which had already been approved by the Ministry of Labour.

Zimbabwe doctors strike continues

A nation-wide strike by more than 400 junior doctors in government-run hospitals entered its eighth day on Tuesday. The doctors are demanding pay increases and a complete overhaul of the health system and working conditions. A lack of essential supplies has led to patients needlessly dying, they complain. The strike has caused the country's biggest hospitals to discharge patients and to operate on an emergency-only basis. State nurses have threatened to join the strike unless the doctors' demands are met.

Moroccan fishermen reject talks

Moroccan coastal fishermen, on strike since September 15, voted to continue their dispute on Monday. In addition to Agadir, several ports on the southern Atlantic coast, including the sardine-rich ports of Essaouira, Safi and Tan-Tan, have joined the strike. The dispute began over better working conditions and in protest at the arrest of three members of the Coastal Fishermen Union (SMPC). Last Friday, an Agadir court sentenced each of them to one year in prison. The fishermen subsequently refused an offer of negotiations with the authorities until the men were released. The SMPC is affiliated to the independent Moroccan Labour Union. Amongst those arrested was SMPC leader, Brahim Mounassir, brother of Abdallah Mounassir, a former union leader who was mysteriously killed in 1997.



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