

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

14 October 1999

French airline workers strike against new contract proposals

Ground staff at Orly airport in Paris took strike action October 7 for one day in a dispute over pay levels and new recruitment proposals. The strikers blocked access roads to the airport and the action led to a number of flight delays. The strike stems from management proposals to change workers' contracts in preparation for introducing a government directive of a 35-hour week across French industry.

Flights departing from Orly and the Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport were also delayed by up to an hour by a fire-fighter's dispute at the airport.

The largest airline union, the SNPL-UNAC, subsequently postponed a further two-day strike scheduled for October 11-12. The union said that it was suspending the strike for one week in order to hold further talks with management. A combination of six smaller unions said they would be instructing their members to stop work on October 11 and 12. The SNPL Air Inter union, representing domestic flight staff, said it would also be supporting the action, which would affect flights within France.

Irish nurses vote to begin a national strike

This week nurses in Ireland voted by an overwhelming majority to take industrial action. The result, announced on October 11, showed nurses favouring strike action by nine to one. The ballot was held after nurses had rejected a pay deal brokered by the Labour Court last month. The strike is to begin October 19 and will be the first-ever national strike by the country's 28,000 nurses.

Scottish postal workers take unofficial strike action

Postal workers in the east of Scotland walked off the job for two days last week in unofficial strike action. The dispute began on October 7 following the sacking of a worker who refused to deliver a television listings magazine. The sacked worker was employed at the

Linlithgow sorting office. Nearly 3,000 staff took part in the stoppage which left a backlog of 3 million items of mail to clear at sorting offices in Lothians, Fife and parts of Central Scotland.

Following the strike, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) local branch secretary, Derek Durkin, said, "We want to return to work as soon as possible and hope that the management are going to take a positive attitude. The man had until the end of the month to make sure the magazines were delivered. It's physically impossible to deliver them in one go." Talks between management and the CWU agreed an end to the dispute after management agreed to the worker's reinstatement, pending an inquiry.

London fire-fighters could strike over the New Year holidays

Fire-fighters in London have threatened to strike during the millennium holiday period in a dispute over the type of contracts that new recruits have to sign. On October 10, the Fire Brigades Union said that the recent Paddington train crash had underscored the need for fire-fighters to have a common contract. The union statement said, "The public can see from the Paddington disaster what a difficult, dangerous and often unpleasant job fire-fighters perform. We all face the same risks and should have the same pay and conditions."

Council workers in Nigeria threaten strike action

The Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) threatened to take industrial action from October 13 unless its demands on government and the constitution are met. These demands include the entrenchment of the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC) in the 1999 Constitution, and the continuation of local government as the third tier of government.

Announcing this in Ilorin, the Kwara State Secretary of NULGE, Mr. Rasaq Lawal, said he viewed the omission of the LGSC from the constitution as an

attempt to swallow up the local councils into the state governments. He added: "In view of these and other issues discussed at the end of the emergency meeting of the national executive council (NEC) held recently at Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, we shall join our colleagues with effect from October 13, 1999, to go on an indefinite strike."

Lawal also questioned the logic of making the payment of teachers' salaries by the state government from the allocations of the local councils: "This deduction has left Ifelodun, Moro, Irepodun, Ilorin West, Oyun, Offa with zero allocation and Ilorin East with a sum less than N30, 000 as allocation. This has culminated in these councils' inability to pay their workers June/July salaries", he said.

2,900 miners to lose jobs at Western Areas, South Africa

The joint venture of Canada's Placer Dome Inc. and Western Areas Ltd. started laying off 2,900 miners on Friday, despite the rally in gold prices over the past week. The joint venture's vice-president, Patrick Evans, said that the Western Areas mine near Johannesburg is going ahead with the retrenchment, since the price increase "has yet to prove to be sustainable". The head of the National Union of Mineworkers legal section said that the recent rally in gold should be reason enough for the mine to reconsider. The union had applied to the Labour Court for an urgent interdict against the retrenchment of its members at the mine, which began on October 1. The application was rejected, on the grounds that the joint venture had "respected the rights of NUM's members."

Evans said that the mine will not change its mind, but held open the possibility that if there were further improvements in profitability, retrenched employees could be recalled. Some 430 workers have already been given voluntary redundancy packages. It is expected that the rest of the job cuts will be enforced within the next two weeks.



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