

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

24 February 2000

Ford salaried workers take nation-wide strike action in Britain

On February 21 approximately 3,000 salaried engineers, computer staff and clerical workers at Ford facilities in the UK walked off the job for one hour in a dispute over pay and pension status. Staff at the company's plants in Dagenham, Halewood, Dunton, Swansea and Bridgend were involved in the dispute. The white-collar staff are demanding a 15 percent pay rise to achieve parity with production workers. The 3,000 salaried workers also oppose the company's proposal to merge their pension fund, which has a surplus, with that of production workers, whose fund is currently in deficit. Ford has offered their professional staff a pay increase of 11 percent. Last year the company increased its hourly paid production workers' salaries by 15 percent, phased in over three years.

Ford of Europe reported last week that it was restructuring its European operations and announced 1,500 job losses at the Dagenham factory. The staff plan further one-day strikes on February 24 and 29 and a three-day stoppage March 6-8.

UK train drivers to strike for seven days

Train drivers at the Connex rail company are to hold seven 24-hour strikes between February and April in their dispute over working hours and pay. The strikes will take place on February 29, March 8, 16, 24, 27, April 4 and 12. They will affect all Connex services from southeast England to London. Connex trains transport more than 200,000 commuters to London each day. The last strike by the drivers took place on January 25 and led to the cancellation of 90 percent of the scheduled trains.

At the end of January, a number of one-day strikes planned for February were called off by the drivers union ASLEF. This followed an agreement with Connex management to reduce the working week from 37 hours to 35 hours, and provide fully pensionable pay. Further talks between ASLEF and Connex have

broken down and the conciliation service ACAS has now been called in to mediate the dispute.

A spokesman for ASLEF said of the latest strike plan, "We don't want to be too specific about our demands. But generally they relate to the specific conduct of meetings, adhering to decisions reached during meetings and allegations of harassment of drivers." Connex said that it had agreed to introduce a 36-hour working week from this October and a 35-hour week from October 2001.

Romanian teachers and defence workers strike

Romanian teachers and defence workers staged strikes on February 22. Tens of thousands of teachers took part in demonstrations across the country, closing schools nationally. They are calling for the allocation of a minimum of four percent of GDP in this year's state budget to be used to double their minimum monthly pay to the equivalent of \$64, as well as funding the retroactive payment of New Year bonuses.

Thousands of Romanian defence workers also struck at a number of state-run factories to demand payment of two months' unpaid wages and to protest government proposals to restructure the industry.

The strikes took place the same day as the coalition government of Mugur Isarescu debated the contents of this year's budget. Isarescu claimed that the government had agreed to raise the education budget by over four percent and called for an end to the teachers walkout.

Strikes by coal miners, tax collectors and customs officials are also expected to take place over the next few weeks.

Nigeria: butchers protest over deteriorating conditions at Lagos abattoir

Butchers declared a strike in Nigeria last Wednesday against deteriorating conditions at Oko-Oba, the Lagos State Abattoir and Lairage Complex. Members of the Lagos State Butchers' Association (LSBA), affiliated to the National Butchers' Union of Nigeria, went on strike and stormed the Lagos State House of Assembly.

Hundreds of protesters carried placards reading "Government, save the Abattoir Complex from collapse" and "Abattoir Complex is dirty."

The protesting butchers said that the abattoir complex was under threat, and that there was an urgent need to save it from complete collapse due to poor management. The workers alleged that the poor sanitary conditions at the abattoir have already led to the deaths of numerous people.

Moroccan teachers hold two-day strike

Moroccan primary and secondary teachers began a two-day strike February 17 to protest government policy.

At a news conference in Rabat, Mohamed Benjelloun Andaloussi, General Secretary of the Teachers' Autonomous Federation, rejected the government's "attempts to freeze teachers' demands," and called for an increase in teachers' salaries and allowances. Andaloussi asked for a "comprehensive, objective and fair revision of internal promotions."

The General Union of Moroccan Workers and the independent Moroccan Labour Union supported the action. The Democratic Labour Confederation, which did not join the recent action, has called for another strike on February 23.

Algerian teachers rally in protest

Following a two-day strike by teachers in the education workers union SETE, several thousand teachers took to the streets of Bejaia on Tuesday February 15. The march proceeded to the office of the province's education director, where protesters demanded their right to lodging and denounced understaffing in the schools.

On the same day, university students in the city of Tizi Ouzou demonstrated against their work conditions and the condition of the university campus.

Kenyan workers issue strike threat

Workers in Kenya's Coast Province will go on strike next week in protest at the sacking and suspension of Mombasa Municipal Council employees. The announcement comes as the expiry date of the 21-day notice issued by the Kenya Local Government Workers Union draws near. The strike notice will expire on February 27.

The council has sacked seven union branch officials and suspended 60 others for "inciting workers to strike". The Local Government Workers Union has

denied that they participated in the strike and maintained that they were assembling at pay points to get their salaries. Mombasa Mayor Masaoud Mwachima said the fate of the seven union officials was already sealed, and the council would not rescind the decision.

The workers are also demanding proper representation in the constitutional review process, currently taking place. They want the laws amended to give better protection to workers. They said workers in the country constituted two thirds of the electorate and their views on the ongoing constitutional review process were important. They also petitioned the government not to give way to pressure from the Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE) to create an Industrial Court of Appeal. They said the creation of such an institution was part of a wider campaign to suppress the voice of workers, who were the "most oppressed in the country," The FKE propose that an Industrial Court of Appeal should consider appeals against cases ruled on in the lower industrial court.

Lecturers strike spreads in Zambia

The strike by lecturers and supporting staff at Luanshya's Technical and Vocational Teachers College (TVTC) has spread to Ndola's Northern Technical College (Nortec). Cooks and other staff have joined the strike to press for letters of retirement and termination benefits as the colleges are transformed under the revised Technical Education and Vocational Entrepreneurship Authority. Lecturers at TVTC resolved to go on strike over a week ago, while their Ndola counterparts joined in the strike last week.

Zimbabwe police fire at striking workers

Riot police fired teargas to disperse a protest on Tuesday by over 2,500 construction workers for better pay and safer working conditions. The workers are also demanding compensation for the families of 15 colleagues who died last December when a hoist carrying builders crashed to the ground at a construction site in central Harare, the capital city. The protesters said they would not return to work until their demands were met.



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