

# Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

9 March 2000

## **French tax collectors strike**

French tax collectors have stepped up their selective strike action in the last week in protest against government restructuring of the service. On March 3, more than 100 tax offices in 30 districts were closed and further stoppages took place on March 6. The collectors planned to take full strike action on March 9 to bring the tax collection system to a halt.

The strikes have been organised to coincide with the busiest time of the year for tax collection, as taxpayers have to present their 1999 tax returns before the March 15 deadline. The government is planning to introduce a system whereby taxpayers only deal with one tax official, instead of the current arrangement where they can deal with several. It also proposes to create separate tax offices for individual and corporate tax collection. The changes threaten thousands of jobs.

Christian Boulais, general secretary of the main tax officers' union SNUI, said that he feared that the strike was "at an impasse which is leading to a radicalisation" of the dispute.

## **Belgrade school children demonstrate in support of teachers**

On March 6, 2,000 secondary school pupils demonstrated in the Serbian capital of Belgrade in support of teachers striking against low wages. The teachers have been on strike for more than a month. Teachers at around 100 schools have stopped holding classes, while 910 out of 1,618 Serbian schools have cut back classes by 15 minutes since late January. At the rally in Central Belgrade, the teachers demanded a general strike of all schoolteachers until their demands have been met.

## **Train union calls off guards strike in Britain**

A planned strike by 5,000 train guards over safety issues was called off by their union, the RMT, after it announced that it had reached an agreement with rail operators on March 2. Guards at 16 of Britain's 23 rail firms had voted last week for a number of one-day

stoppages in opposition to proposals by rail infrastructure operator Railtrack to put train drivers in charge of safety and to degrade the role of guards. No details have yet been made available about the agreement and more talks are scheduled between the RMT and the rail operators. An unidentified union official said that there had been a "positive" outcome to the negotiations.

## **Ford UK professionals staff accept new pay and pension deal**

On March 3, 3,000 engineering, technical and clerical workers at Ford UK voted by a 3 to 1 margin to accept a new pay and pensions deal. The TGWU and MSF unions recommended the deal, which included an 11 percent pay rise over three years and a "job evaluation programme". The workers had demanded a 15 percent pay increase to achieve parity with Ford's production workers. They had struck for one hour on February 21 in opposition to Ford's previous pay offer of 11 percent and had scheduled a two-day strike to begin March 6. Ford had also proposed to merge the pension funds of both sets of workers. The company said that this would now not take place, but that further discussions would be held on the issue.

## **Nigerian oil workers strike**

Members of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (Pengassan) in Lagos are taking strike action against a government decision to transfer workers from the petroleum resources department to a newly created Ministry of the Environment. The transfers will mean check-off dues from pay packages will be paid directly to the new ministry rather than to Pengassan. A spokesman for the striking workers, Rasaq Adeniran, said that the action, which has led to fuel shortages and increased petrol and transport charges, could also spread to other cities.

## **Sacked Kenyan teachers reinstated**

More than 11,000 teachers were reinstated on Tuesday, March 7 after a meeting between government

education officials and union chiefs. The teachers were sacked by the Teachers Service Commission for failing to produce academic and professional documents and copies of their identity cards. The teachers will now be given until April 15 to produce the missing documents.



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