

# Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

16 March 2000

## **Supplier strike stops production at Volkswagen plant in Spain**

On March 8, Volkswagen's production plant in the northern Spanish region of Navarra was halted due to a strike at a supplier company. The plant employs more than 5,000 workers who produce the Polo hatchback model.

Four hundred workers at Logistica Navarra, who organise the supply of parts for the production line at the Volkswagen plant, took strike action in a dispute over pay.

On the first day of the strike Volkswagen's car output was cut by 600 units to half the normal daily production. The plant normally works three shifts and daily production is around 1,100 vehicles a day. The dispute affected around 80 percent of the workforce in Navarra, and Volkswagen said it was to consider temporary layoffs if the dispute continued.

## **Irish medical workers to strike against low pay**

Sixteen thousand members of the Irish trade union IMPACT are to strike on March 22. They are demanding pay rises for temporary and part-time health workers in paramedic, clerical, administrative and other grades. The part-time workers are currently not allowed beyond the "fifth point" of the pay incremental scale and cannot earn more than £12,091 a year. The top of the pay scale is £17,988.

The Psychiatric Nurses Association (PNA) is also to ballot its 4,500 members on industrial action, after it claimed that there has been a breach of the commitments given to nurses following their recent national strike. The PNA said the "Programme for Prosperity and Fairness" had broken a commitment from the government that pay rates for nurses in promotional grades would be reviewed. The union has called for an immediate pay award of £1,000 to its members.

Another union threatening to ballot its membership for strike action is the Irish Medical Organisation. It is

currently in dispute with the Health Service Employers' Agency over the pay of non-consultant hospital doctors. The IMO said that if progress were not made in talks by St. Patrick's Day, it would call for strike action.

## **London rail workers vote to strike to reinstate sacked colleague**

Rail workers employed by South West Trains voted this week to strike in protest against the sacking of a train driver. Sarah Friday, sacked last month, was the health and safety representative of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) for the rail staff at Waterloo Station, London. She has alleged that she was dismissed for raising concerns over safety as part of her union work.

More than 150 drivers and guards at Waterloo, where South West Trains is based, voted 5 to 1 in favour of industrial action on March 23 and 31 and have demanded the reinstatement of Friday.

## **Bus workers in Scotland take industrial action in pay dispute**

On March 11, 500 workers struck for 24 hours against the Stagecoach Western bus company in a dispute over pay. The strike affected many services in the southwest of Scotland. Routes in Dumfries, Galloway, Ayrshire and Arran were particularly disrupted.

The strike went ahead following a breakdown in talks between the unions and management the previous day. The talks have been ongoing for 18 months. Staff are calling for a pay increase. Stagecoach said that it had offered a 9 percent rise but had now withdrawn this following the strike action. Talks were set to continue this week.

## **Finnish airline workers vote to strike**

Finnish baggage handling staff have voted to strike on March 20 in a dispute over pay and working hours. A strike by the 3,700 workers would halt air traffic completely. The Union of Aviation Workers has called

for a pay increase of 7 percent while the airline industry has offered only 3.1 percent. Airline workers are also demanding a shorter working week and higher overtime payments.

It has been estimated that a strike would cost Finnish airlines some 20 million markka a day. More than 10 percent of Finland's exports are shipped by air and the stoppage would mean additional losses to Finnish industry of around 70 million markka per day.

### **Packaging workers strike in Nigeria**

Work at WAHUM Packaging Limited in the Ogba Industrial Estate, Ikeja, Lagos, was halted on Tuesday as workers at the company protested against what they called "exploitation without pay". Over 500 workers, including confirmed staff and casual workers, are protesting the recent increase of their working hours (from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.) without pay.

Trouble started at about 7:00 a.m. when around 350 workers arrived at the company premises with placards shouting anti-management slogans and threatened a showdown with the company's personnel manager, Mr. Ekenna, whom they accused of being behind the cause of their grievance.

The casual workers, who earn about N110 (\$1.20) daily, complained of ill treatment by the Chinese management of the company. They also accused the company of exploitation, and "unwarranted termination of appointments". Police stormed the protesting workers and local media said three police vans with about 15 armed policemen were keeping vigil at the premises.

### **Staff protest cripples Nigerian Federal Institute of Industrial Research**

Activities at the Federal Institute of Industrial Research, Oshodi (FIIRO) were recently brought to a standstill as 1,000 staff protested against the alleged bad practices of its director, Professor Sunday Ayodele Odunfa. The strike was organised by the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), Dr. Amoah-Thomas and the Senior Staff Association of Teaching Hospitals, Universities, Research Institutions and Associate Institutions (SSATHURIAI).

Chanting war songs and carrying placards reading: "Odunfa Must Go", "We are tired of Injustice", the union alleged that its members are being denied promotion by the director, against Civil Service regulations.

NASU Secretary-General Elder Kayode Olagunju said that their anger stemmed from the fact that "Professor Odunfa spent N23,850.00 on his dog but could not approve N5,000.00, being the medical bill of staff". He said that their protest is only restricted to the director since Odunfa has turned management staff into "robots".

In his remarks Rv. Dr. Amoah-Thomas said that their Kano office, which used to be the "heartbeat" of FIIRO's activities, is now in shambles as all the allowances of the security staff have not been paid. "Our Kano office is like a mortuary. Activities there are at a standstill. All we are saying is that as an enemy of both the junior and senior staff, Odunfa must go back to the class because we don't want him here," Amoah-Thomas said..

The Federal Institute of Industrial Research, part of the Ministry of Science and Technology, carries out food research, engineering and documentation of journals and publications. The workers vowed to continue their indefinite strike until Odunfa is removed as director.

### **Nation-wide strikes in Algeria**

Two trade unions, the CDT and UMT, called for general strike action by farming and agriculture workers on March 9 and 10. The unions have also asked the workers to stage a sit-in in various locations throughout the country to protest the government's agricultural policies.

Employees of the insurer Compagnie Africaine d'Assurances have staged a half-day sit-in at the request of the CDT trade union. Observers reported 80 percent participation.



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