

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

20 April 2000

Czech miners continue occupation

Forty-six miners who are occupying the Kohinoor mine in the Northern Bohemia region of the Czech Republic are continuing their sit-in against the threatened closure of the mine.

On April 17, the occupation entered its sixteenth day. Over 600 people in Kohinoor, located in an area of high unemployment, held a demonstration in support of the miners. Those in attendance included the wives and families of the strikers.

Last year the government included the mine in its national closure program. Following a previous sit-down protest by miners in December, the government said it would phase in the closure over five years and subsidise the mine with a further credit of 600 million crowns. This year the government has cut the subsidy to 161.8 million crowns and demanded the speedy closure of the mine. Kohinoor is owned by Mostecka uhelna spolecnost (MUS). The miners are calling for it to be sold to an owner who will preserve their jobs.

Finnish paperworkers strike set to end

A nationwide Finnish paperworkers strike is set to end this week following the acceptance by the trade union and the employers of a settlement drawn up by the state mediator, Juhani Salenius.

The strike involving 30,000 workers began on April 11 following disagreements over the content of a new contract, particularly on the issue of wages and hours. The paperworkers union, Paperiliitto, accepted the deal on April 18 and will now put it before its National Council for ratification. The industrial action will be ended following their approval.

The proposed settlement includes a 4 percent pay increase for this year plus one day extra holiday per year for those working daily and weekly shifts. The agreement also proposes tighter regulation of the outsourcing of contracts in the industry. The deal is to run for three years, although the pay rise will be reviewed after just one year.

The dispute had a major impact on Finland's economy. Finland is the world's second biggest paper and board exporter, after Canada. The strike closed the Finland-based mills of Europe's biggest, second-largest and fourth-largest paper and board producers, Stora Enso, UPM-Kymmene and Metsa-Serla.

Firefighters in Northern Ireland to ballot on strike action

Firefighters in Northern Ireland are to hold a strike ballot for the first time in 25 years. The ballot has been organised by the Fire Brigades Union in protest at a decision by the Fire Authority to end a special allowance for new recruits who attend civil disturbances. Since January 1998 firefighters in Northern Ireland have dealt with 1,749 civil disturbance call-outs. The Fire Authority said it was withdrawing the allowance as part of an efficiency drive to cut its costs by 2 percent. The result of the postal ballot will be announced on May 4.

Industrial action in Ireland at highest level for a decade

A report issued this week said that working days lost to industrial action in Ireland last year were at the highest level for a decade. The survey, produced by the Central Statistics Office, recorded 34 industrial disputes involving 36,500 workers and 127 companies last year. In total 215,587 days were lost to industrial action in 1999, compared to 222,900 days in 1990. The majority of workers (90 percent) involved in strike action were in the service sector. The bulk of the days lost were due to the national nurses' strike, which involved 178,530 lost working days.

Tyre workers strike in Mozambique

A strike by workers at the Maputo tyre factory, Mabor de Mocambique, began Friday, April 14. The leader of the trade union committee at the plant, Augusto Muzamane, is reported saying: "We're on strike because we think it's time the company increased our wages. We are demanding that the minimum wage

at Mabor be increased from 630,000 meticaïs to 1.5 million meticaïs a month." This would be an increase of about US\$100 on a mere US\$70 a month, a rise of 138 percent. Management told the union committee in March that it could not afford a minimum wage of 1.5 million meticaïs and offered 900,000 meticaïs. The union were prepared to reduce their claim to 1.25 million meticaïs a month, but added other demands, including a reduction in the working week to five days, a bonus at New Year equal to a month's wage, new work clothes every six months, and equal treatment of the 494 local workers at Mabor with six foreign workers.

General strike in Burkina Faso against state repression

Universities and secondary schools have reopened in Burkina Faso after a three-day general strike. There were demonstrations and violent clashes with the authorities during the action, organised by a coalition of Burkinabe opposition and trade union groups called Contre L'Impunite. The coalition was protesting the refusal of the state to investigate a series of murders of opponents of the regime, including a well-known journalist, Norbert Zongo. The government has announced the release of five human rights campaigners, including Halidou Ouedraogo, a leader of Contre L'Impunite.

Morocco dock strike

A strike is continuing by 3,000 civil servants and dockers at Morocco's main port of Casablanca, which began on Thursday, April 13. Seventy percent of Morocco's freight traffic goes through the port. Unions representing the workers are demanding that the state-run port authority keep to an agreement over pay rises and working conditions. At least 50 ships containing oil, sugar and cereals have been held up. A spokesman for the Union Marocaine du Travail said that the strike could spread to other ports such as Tangiers, Nador and Jorf Lasfar.



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