

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

27 April 2000

Czech miners end sit-down strike

On April 22, 46 Czech coal miners ended their three-week occupation of the Kohinoor mine in northern Bohemia. The miners spent nearly 22 days underground in opposition to the government's plan to close Kohinoor. They were calling for the resignation of the management of the mine and its sale to a company that would guarantee their jobs. The government and the present owners of the mine, Mostecka Uhelna Spolecnost, rejected these demands, stating only that they would grant compensation payments to workers laid off by the Kohinoor closure.

Portuguese airport workers strike to demand better working conditions

Airport emergency ground staff struck at several airports for 24 hours on April 24 to demand better working conditions, including more training and stricter safety measures. The strike was called by the Aviation and Airport Workers' Union. The airport staff operate fire engines and ambulances and confront any emergency situation during landings or takeoffs. The strike resulted in the delay and cancellation of a number of TAP Air Portugal, British Airways and Air France flights at the Francisco Sa Carneiro airport in Oporto. Around 30 flights that were scheduled to arrive at Faro airport had to re-route to Lisbon or the Spanish cities of Seville and Malaga.

British teachers' conference votes to hold strike ballot

The National Union of Teachers' (NUT) conference voted this week to hold a strike ballot to protest the Blair government's new teacher performance related pay proposals. On April 25 delegates at the NUT conference in Harrogate rejected the government's proposals and voted by 105,208 to 82,114 to hold a strike ballot.

The leadership of the union and General Secretary Doug McAvoy actively campaigned against the strike ballot motion and in support of the government. In his

speech to conference, McAvoy condemned the strike vote as "pre-determined political posturing" and said that he would personally campaign against a strike being held. He attempted to pre-empt a united campaign between teachers and parents by saying "parents would be appalled by the decision" and would be "unable to understand it".

The vote at the conference commits the union to call a ballot for a one-day strike at the earliest opportunity. Other action called for included a work to rule, whereby teachers would boycott out-of-school and voluntary activities. McAvoy said that the leadership would consider a prior "indicative" ballot of its membership before a strike ballot. Education Secretary David Blunkett also attacked the strike ballot vote and said it represented "the first time in history that a union conference has voted for strike action when offered a pay rise for simply doing their jobs well".

Zimbabwean government reneges on civil servants' pay rise

The crisis-ridden Zimbabwean government has refused to allow a 30 percent salary increase for all civil servants, citing lack of funds. This raises the possibility of a countrywide strike over pay like that held by civil servants last year that brought services to a standstill.

Representatives of civil servants said last week that the 30 percent pay rise had been outstanding from the package agreed to by the government last year. This lifted wages by 69 to 90 percent to keep them from falling too far behind inflation. The final 30 percent of this package was supposed to take effect in April this year. Representatives of civil servants yesterday said there was no going back on the new increase. Public Service Association (PSA) Executive Secretary Charles Chiviru said civil servants were faced with numerous hardships caused by Zimbabwe's rapidly worsening economic crisis and needed the 30 percent pay rise.

Regional protests against ANC government's labour laws

More than 50,000 Cosatu trade union members gathered in various parts of Durban, South Africa on Thursday, April 20 to protest against job losses in the last leg of its regional campaign. Cosatu wants the government to amend section 189 of the Labour Relations Act to force companies to negotiate “unavoidable” retrenchments with unions. Thousands of Cosatu members brought central Johannesburg to a halt last week in the Gauteng leg of the campaign. Another 12,000 members converged on different towns in Mpumalanga. Cosatu, the main South African trades union federation, which is in a partnership with the ANC and the South African Communist Party, is limiting opposition to the wave of restructuring and job losses to separate, low-key protests in the regions of South Africa.

Ugandan workers shot at for demanding wages

Two workers of the National Housing and Construction Corporation (NHCC) were shot at April 19 on the Naalya Housing Estate during a strike by 500 casual labourers over non-payment of their wages for six weeks. There were no reported injuries. The NHCC agreed to pay the wages the following day and accepted responsibility for the incident. There was no mention of punishing anyone for the shooting.



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