

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

22 June 2000

## **British postal workers threaten strike action**

Post Office staff are threatening industrial action over a proposal to use a private company to handle international mail leaving Britain. The UK's state-owned postal service has been in secret talks with the private Dutch service. If agreed, it will be the first time that a private firm has taken responsibility for Royal Mail post.

The mail service is also involved in negotiations with unions over its plans to shift 1,500 jobs out of central London's Mount Pleasant sorting office.

## **Polish unions suspend rail strike for two weeks**

Trade unions last week postponed a planned strike at the State Railways (PKP) for a fortnight, to enable talks between management and government on the troubled company's future.

The action had threatened to paralyse the country's transport system and create serious political problems for the government led by the Solidarity bloc, which lost its parliamentary majority last week after the Freedom Unity party (UW) quit the ruling coalition.

The unions have called on the government to write off PKP's 6.3 billion zloty (\$1.43 billion) debt and increase its subsidy for the loss-making passenger services. The government intend to privatise the company over the next three years, reducing the workforce from its current 190,000 to 140,000.

## **Irish railworkers continue unofficial strike**

A breakaway train drivers union in the Republic of Ireland resumed unofficial strike action after the state rail company refused to negotiate with them. Services between Dublin and most of Ireland's main cities, including Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford, were affected. A spokesman for the rail company said it was not prepared to negotiate with the Irish Locomotives Drivers' Union because it has no legal right to represent drivers. The ILDA represents 120 out of Ireland's 340 train drivers. ILDA members have refused to work a new roster system because it involves longer hours and

compulsory Sunday and holiday working.

## **Nigerian workers resist return to work**

Workers in Bauchi have refused to return to work after the nation-wide strike against a recent hike in fuel prices was called off. The workers are demanding a minimum wage of N6,500 (US\$65) to cover rising costs, after the government imposed a 50 percent increase in the price of petroleum products. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) had agreed last week to abandon the strike, having concluded an agreement with the government that petrol prices would rise by 10 percent.

Bauchi NLC members have rejected this deal. A press statement from the NLC state council, signed by Mohammed Koli and M.L. Aliyu, chairman and secretary respectively, directed civil servants in the state not to return to work. "Workers are hereby informed that even if the fuel crisis is resolved, workers in Bauchi shall remain on strike over the issue of new minimum wage which the state government is still adamant about," the statement said. The Bauchi state government is threatening to lay off at least 2,000 workers if they do not return to work soon.

All over the country, workers have shown their willingness to take action for the new minimum wage. Nigerian nurses are also threatening to embark on strike action if the national government continues to ignore their plight. The state governors, however, are determined to stick to their allocated budgets. Governors of the 19 northern states have also reportedly held a meeting where they rejected the new minimum wage.

## **Kenyan employees expose harassment**

More than 300 Raiply employees in Eldoret have accused the firm of racism and harassment. They said that some of the departmental managers and supervisors were insulting and underpaying them. The workers, who spoke during a visit to the offices of the *Nation* newspaper on Tuesday, said that whenever they

complained over failure to pay them they were called “stupid Africans”.

“We sometimes receive less than Sh1,500 (US\$20) after working for more than 24 days. This is inadequate to feed our families for the whole month,” a worker commented.

Statutory deductions were calculated from work tickets that are supposed to verify the number of hours worked, but are sometimes unsigned. Workers particularly complained about a sawmill manager seen harassing permanent employees.

Some workers had been diverted from their designated place of work and taken to staff houses, which are occupied by managers, to wash clothes, cook and conduct general cleaning. The workers said that those who protested had been sacked.



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