

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

14 September 2000

Greek airport staff to begin 48-hour strike this week

On September 7 airport ground and maintenance crews in Greece announced that they would stage a 48-hour strike on September 15 and 16. The 1,800 workers are in dispute over pay and job security and have demanded that they be paid for overtime and will keep their jobs when the main Greek airport relocates to a new facility in eastern Athens.

At present air authority management have refused to accept the workers demand.

The strike had originally been planned for July, but was postponed by the aviation workers union "in a show of good will." The union called off the strike because of the crisis caused by the forest fires burning around the country at that time.

Eurotunnel train drivers in trade union recognition dispute

Eurotunnel train drivers are to hold a strike ballot over the issue of trade union recognition, it was announced this week. The ballot for a series of 24-hour walkouts is being organised by the train drivers' union Aslef that has 230 Eurotunnel members.

The ballot is to begin on September 18 and if successful, strike action could take place next month.

The strike ballot is the latest development in an ongoing dispute over a single union deal struck between Eurotunnel and the Transport and General Workers Union. That agreement stipulates that only the TGWU can represent Eurotunnel employees, including train drivers. During the past 2 weeks Aslef train drivers have refused to work overtime in opposition to the union being derecognised.

Postal workers continue strike in South Wales

Postal workers in South Wales took further strike action on September 11 in a dispute over the sacking of two colleagues. The strike closed delivery offices in Aberdare, Pontypridd and Bridgend and resulted in mail not being delivered to thousands of homes.

The action was the latest in a series of 24-hour strikes by 300 postal staff who are calling for the reinstatement of the two workers. The Royal Mail sacked the two postal workers on the grounds that they had taken "excessive" sick leave.

A spokesman for the Communication Workers Union said that employees are being dismissed for taking sick leave regardless of illness. In some cases these included accidents while on duty such as dog bites.

Lagos State workers set for battle with employers

Workers in Lagos State are set to resume their strike this week to escalate their struggle for a minimum wage of N7,500. Ayodele Akele, chairman of the Lagos State Council of Industrial Unions admitted that workers were becoming impatient with the Industrial Arbitration Panel (IAP), and were demanding action.

The strike was suspended on July 12, following the intervention of Adams Oshiomhole, president of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), who paved the way for another round of negotiations between the workers and Lagos State government.

The government agreed to negotiate but the talks soon reached a deadlock. Lagos State government took the issue to the IAP on July 27. Before then, the state government had agreed to pay N7,500 minimum wage to workers on grade levels 01 to 06 and promised to embark on full implementation of N7,500 for all "as and when sustainable revenue is assured." Having worked with the unions to prevent the Lagos strike from broadening into a national strike for a minimum wage, and defused the strike in Lagos itself, the state government saw no reason now to act on their promise.

Nairobi City Hall workers defy union

Council workers in Nairobi, Kenya, on strike to pressure City Hall for the release of their delayed salaries, last week ignored a notice issued through the press by their union representatives, calling off the action. The workers camped outside City Hall are demanding to be paid their July and August salaries as

promised.

On September 3, the union's Nairobi branch secretary, George Kioni and chairman, Danson Njihia urged the workers to remain at their places of work, saying the government had released Sh250 million for their salaries. The union officials changed their minds after they were booed and heckled by the strikers, who pelted them with stones and threatened to lynch them. They told the workers that the notice to call off the strike was only a temporary move to allow the council to process the salaries after receiving money from the central government.

Kenyan security guards strike over low pay

On September 11 some 500 security guards took to Nairobi streets protesting against delayed salaries and poor working conditions. Their march brought parts of the city to a standstill. A vehicle, belonging to a senior officer with one of the security firms, was set ablaze.

The strike was called after the expiry of the notice issued to the Labour Minister Joseph Ngutu by more than 500 shop stewards of the Kenya Guards and Allied Workers (KEGAWU). But the Minister denied receiving the notice.

The guards accused their employers of failing to remit statutory deductions, among other things. They claimed that the union chairman, Joseph Mujema, had been compromised to call off the strike. The guards voted him out of office and replaced him with Willis Mailu from Factory Guards. "Mr Mujema has no right to call off the strike. It is the duty of our secretary general," said one angry guard.

The protesters said that their employers had not been paying them enough to sustain themselves and their families. On average, a guard is said to earn some 2,700 shillings (about 35 US dollars) a month, which cannot meet the high cost of living in Nairobi. It was the second strike by the guards in the year.

South African metalworkers go on strike

About 3000 Delta Motor Company employees embarked on a strike this week, after the National Union of Metalworkers (Numsa) of South Africa accused the company of "negotiating in bad faith". Delta had promised, in negotiations with the union, to increase the pay of workers who had completed training courses, but it had failed to do so. The union said the company had also infringed workers' rights by visiting their homes when they called in sick.



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