Workers Struggles: Europe, Africa & the Middle East

7 September 2000

French truckers blockade oil depots to demand cut in fuel price

On September 5, truckers in France mounted nationwide blockades in protest against high diesel fuel prices. The truckers are calling on the government to cut the cost of fuel by 20 percent. During the action, which is ongoing, the protesters formed blockades outside 60 out of the country's 70 oil depots, involving 2,000 vehicles.

The action led to many petrol stations running dry. In the eastern town of Dijon, 80 percent of petrol stations ran out of fuel, while in the southern city of Marseille nearly 50 percent of stations had run out. In Lyon, petrol stations were instructed to supply only doctors, hospitals and emergency services.

The action is set to broaden as taxi drivers, private ambulances firms and bus companies said that they would support the protest.

Over the past weeks negotiations between Transport Minister Jean-Claude Gayssot and unions representing workers in the haulage industry have failed to reach an agreement over the price of diesel. On September 4, the government offered to cut fuel tax by about half the 50 centimes per litre (six US cents) demanded by the unions. The unions rejected that offer and negotiations are continuing.

Spain and Belgium: truckers and farmers threaten blockades over fuel price

In Spain, truckers and farmers have formed a joint organisation and have threatened to begin blockades of oil and petrol depots in a campaign to reduce fuel prices. Farmers groups in Spain are calling on the government to create a new fuel pricing system for the entire agricultural sector. The haulage unions in Spain are also demanding exemption from new taxes being imposed on hydrocarbon pollution.

This week, Febetra, the main truckers union in Belgium called for a demonstration in Brussels on September 10 as an "initial warning" to the government, in a bid to force them to lower fuel prices. Febetra said that further protest action could then take place. The truckers are also campaigning against deductions from their salaries by the government.

Israeli fuel supply workers strike against threat of privatisation

Workers employed by the state-owned fuel supply company took strike action on September 5 in opposition to government plans to divide and privatise the company. The company owns and operates 98 percent of the national fuel supply market.

The strike at the Petroleum and Energy Infrastructure Ltd. will affect all industries except military facilities. The Israel Electric Company reported that it had only enough fuel to supply its power stations for five days.

Negotiations on the future of the company are continuing between the National Infrastructure Ministry and unions representing the workers.

Nigerian newspaper paralysed by strike

A strike at Nigeria's leading independent newspaper *The Guardian*, has paralysed production since Tuesday. The strike is in protest against the recent sacking of two members of the editorial staff for seeking better conditions of service. The dismissal's came at the height of agitation by *Guardian* staff for better pay. Three years ago, three employees of the newspaper were sacked under similar circumstances.

Hundreds of mineworkers go on strike in South Africa

400 members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) at Bayer Chrome Mines in Rustenburg are on strike over pay, demanding a living allowance of R100 as opposed to R32 offered by the company.

Over 60 security guards at four Mpumalanga collieries in South Africa have been striking since

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Monday last week demanding a 15 percent salary increase. The guards are also members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and work for Grey Securities, which has contracts with the mines. The company is offering a 5.5 percent pay rise.

Nigerian teachers begin strike

Primary and secondary school teachers in Nigeria are on strike this week, over the issue of salary arrears. The strike call came just as schools in some states that had been on long vacation were expected to resume.

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) had given the Federal Government a seven-day ultimatum to pay the primary school teachers salary arrears by last Thursday or face industrial action. The Federal Government has refused to pay teachers their wages since May.

Nigerian arbitration body used to threaten strikers

Public sector workers in Osun State have now been on strike for six weeks over the level of the minimum wage. At the weekend the Deputy Governor of the state, Otunba Iyiola Omisore, threatened the strikers with charges of contempt of court unless they heeded the ruling of the Industrial Arbitration Panel (IAP) that they should resume work Monday. Omisore described the workers' decision to continue their strike as “very dangerous.”

The workers had resolved at a meeting last Friday not to resume for duties as directed until the state government agreed to pay them the N6, 500 they are demanding as a minimum wage. There have been eyewitness accounts that the chairman of the state council of the NLC, Peter Ajayi and his team were almost mobbed by angry workers when he tried to justify the decision of the IAP.

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