

Workers Struggles: Europe, the Middle East & Africa

21 September 2000

Spanish fishermen and hauliers continue protests against fuel costs

Fishermen in Spain blockaded the country's second-busiest port on September 18 in opposition to the high cost of fuel. The fishermen anchored 20 fishing boats just outside the mouth of Barcelona before dawn, blockading the port until the following morning. Some 13 vessels waiting to dock were affected and two cruise ships were diverted to other ports.

The fishermen are part of National Platform of Fuel Consumers, a coalition that includes taxi drivers and farmers. The organisation has called on the government to reduce government taxes on fuel that account for 60 percent of its cost. On September 19, an estimated 100,000 farmers drove tractors through Madrid and dozens of other Spanish cities. Hauliers at a number of fuel distribution points were still maintaining some blockades as of September 19. CLH, the national fuel distribution company, said access to five of its centres in the cities of Leon, Rota, Cartagena, Burgos and Girona had been prevented by the blockade.

Ford workers in Dagenham, England take unofficial strike action against closure plans

Autoworkers at Fords' auto plant in Dagenham, London took unofficial strike action this week. The workers who are employed in the plants trim shop and on the assembly line walked off the job for two hours on the evening of September 17.

The immediate cause of the unofficial action was suspicion among the workforce that Ford plans to close the assembly line earlier than previously announced and had begun trying to shift staff to the engine plant in preparation. Fords has said production of the Fiesta model at Dagenham will end in early 2002 and a new Fiesta will be built in Cologne, Germany. The closure will result in the loss of 1,900 jobs.

On September 19, union shop stewards announced

that the 6,000 workers at Dagenham would be balloted for strike action. An official of the AEEU engineering union said that there was "a determined resistance" among the workforce and said that the dispute could spread to other Ford plants in the UK.

Greek ferry workers begin strike

Greek ferry workers began a strike on September 13 in a dispute over unpaid overtime payments. The action, which hit the main ferry operator Minoan Lines, resulted in hundreds of tourists and other travellers being left stranded at Athens' main port of Piraeus and several popular island resorts.

On September 16, around 15 Minoan Lines services were cancelled at Piraeus and the port of Rafina, 17 miles east of Athens. The Merchant Marine Ministry demanded that the dispute be ended and threatened to take legal action. On September 19, the dispute ended following an agreement between the seamen's union and the ferry company to compensate the ferry workers for the overtime payments.

Telecom and postal workers strike in Greece against privatisation

Greek telecom workers struck on September 19 against government to privatise the state-owned telephone company. More than 2,000 striking telecommunications employees marched on parliament in opposition to the plan. The workers are members of the Federation of Workers in Greek Telecommunications. The stoppage is the latest in a series of strikes held over the last week. The OME-OTE represents about 20,000 telecom workers.

The government is preparing to sell a 51 percent stake in the Hellenic Telecommunications Organisation, or OTE. The telecom workers were joined in their demonstration by striking postal workers who also struck for 24 hours to protest government plans to privatise a number of other state-run utilities and

companies.

Danish recreation centre workers strike against budget cuts

Staff at more than 100 recreation centres in Copenhagen took strike action this week. They are protesting against a decision the local council to close a number of centres in the morning in order to cut public spending. It follows a dispute at Copenhagen's kindergartens and day nurseries last year. The latter were blockaded by staff and parents following budget cuts.

Fuel price protests in Israel

Cab drivers blocked traffic on the main Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway on September 19. The action was the latest in a weeklong campaign to oppose the increase in the price of diesel fuel. Two days previously the price of diesel was increased by 13 percent. On the same day two convoys of truckers set out from the northern ports of Acre and Haifa and drove slowly down the coastal highway. Another truckers convoy blocked traffic from the southern port of Ashdod to the centre of the country. The government condemned the protests and said in a statement that it had no control over the price of imported fuel. Finance Ministry spokeswoman Orit Reuveni said, "Under no circumstances will we subsidise hauling prices."

Nigerian doctors begin nation-wide strike

The National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) began an indefinite strike Wednesday last week, to protest against the federal government's non-payment of wages. The doctors are owed three months salary, after the government refused to pay them in punishment for strike action they took last year.

NARD is also asking for the government to harmonise basic salaries and call duty allowances paid to doctors for extra hours. The government failed to implement a 150 percent increase for doctors' call duty, hazard and journal allowances announced last November. The Federal Ministry of Health had insisted on delaying its implementation until January 2000.

Nigerian teachers strike over salary arrears

The Nigerian government owes primary school teachers N50 billion in salary arrears. Primary school teachers have been on strike for two weeks now, following the refusal of the federal, state and local governments to settle their outstanding salaries.

On Monday the government said that it did have

enough money to pay the teachers, but that it was withholding payment because of the number of "ghost" workers detected on the wage profile submitted by some of the ministries.

Most federal civil servants are still owed their salaries for July and August. Tension is said to be mounting in Abuja due to the delays. To prevent any mobilisation against the non-payment of salaries, the government has deployed armed policemen to the Federal Secretariat Complex in Abuja.

Nigerian oil workers strike causes fuel queues

Members of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria and the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas went on strike Tuesday last week after negotiations for a pay rise failed. Fuel queues have worsened in Lagos as negotiations between the workers and their employers remained deadlocked. The workers, from the seven major oil companies in the country, are seeking a 25 percent minimum pay rise from their employers, in line with the new minimum wage announced by the federal government on May 1.



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