

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

29 September 2000

German lorry drivers and farmers continue protest to demand cut in fuel prices

On September 26, over 7,000 German lorry drivers and farmers blockaded the streets of central Berlin, bringing traffic to a standstill during the morning rush hour. The protesters came from all over the country. The main boulevard to the west of the Brandenburg Gate was closed off.

The action was part of a week long protest to demand cuts in fuel prices. Truckers and farmers are calling for a reduction in tax on oil prices and cuts in the "eco-tax" on fuel. The price of fuel is due to be increased again this coming January.

Taxi drivers supported the protest and the demonstrators held a midday rally in the square next to the Reichstag, Germany's parliament. The police were eager to ensure that the protest did not spread and escorted the heavy vehicles along three agreed convoy routes into the city centre. Some 350 lorries were prevented from entering the city.

Local government workers in Scotland continue dispute over pay

On September 20, local government workers in Scotland struck for 24 hours in an ongoing dispute over pay. Around 70,000 workers were involved in the action that closed schools, libraries and sports centres in 32 Local Authorities across the country. In Glasgow all libraries except four were shut. Some schools were closed and council buses normally used to transport children to school did not run. In East Renfrewshire, 1,300 staff participated in the strike. In Aberdeen the strike led to the closure of the Art Gallery, Maritime Museum and Town House.

The strike was the second 24-hour stoppage called by the public services union Unison. The union claims that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (Cosla) has reneged on an agreement to increase the pay of local government staff. Cosla has offered an increase of just 2.5 percent. Cosla has stated that it will not

increase the offer and has called on the Scottish Executive to help resolve the dispute. Jack McConnell, the Finance minister of the Executive, said that more money would be available for Cosla but not until next year.

Belgian airport ground staff and fire-fighters strike against privatisation

Ground staff at Brussels International Airport struck for 24 hours on September 25. The stoppage was in protest against management plans to privatise airport services and was called by ground staff unions. The strike caused numerous delays and cancellations with Belgium's Sabena airline revealing that it cancelled around 50 European flights.

Airline authorities had announced that the strike would not affect many flights but the lack of fire-fighters on duty meant that only one runway was opened. A further 24-hour strike is planned for October 3, if there is no resolution to the dispute.

Greek bank workers protest to cut working week

On September 22, Greek bank employees struck for 24 hours as part of a campaign to demand a shorter working week. The Greek Federation of Bank Employee Unions called the strike. Union members are calling on the government to cut the working week from over 38 hours to 35 hours. Staff are also protesting the fact that some employees have to work more hours without overtime pay.

Cyprus pilots strike to demand fairer promotion policy

On September 20, pilots in Cyprus struck for 24 hours in a dispute over their employer's promotion policy. The pilots work for Eurocypria, a charter firm run by Cyprus Airways and say that their own chances of promotion are inferior to those employed directly by Cyprus Airways.

Flights to and from Larnaca and Paphos in Cyprus were affected by the action, with long delays leaving many passengers stranded. A number of flights to

Britain were also affected. The pilots strike won support from cabin and ground staff.

Nigeria's Public Service workers vow to continue their strike

Angry Nigerian public service workers booed and heckled union officials when they tried to persuade them to call off their strike over a minimum wage. Leaders of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), had called a congress last week in Osun State, to inform strikers about a directive from the Industrial Arbitration Panel (IAP), demanding they return to work immediately. The IAP threatened union leaders with imprisonment for contempt of court if they refused to obey the directive.

But as the chairman of the State NLC, Mr Ade Ajayi, was addressing the strikers, the meeting erupted. The strikers vowed not to return to work until the government agreed to their demands on the minimum wage. They also forced their leaders to take an oath that they would not abandon the struggle until the demands were met. Fearing that the IAP may carry out its threat to imprison leaders of the NLC for contempt of court when they returned to Lagos, an “alternative executive” was put in place.

Nigerian journalists sacked after pay protest

Three officials of the *Guardian* newspaper's Chapel of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Nigeria have been sacked for leading a march of *Guardian* employees in support of their pay demand. Negotiations and strike threats have yielded no result, so workers organised a protest march that held up production. Management immediately sacked officials of the NUJ chapel, whom they deemed responsible for the action, including chairman Gbolanhan Gbadamosi. They have warned that they will act against any member of staff “engaging in activity capable of disrupting the smooth operations” of the company.

Guardian workers are threatening to down tools in support of any staff victimised on account of their actions.



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