

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

6 October 2000

Greek truckers call off strike

On October 3, Greek truckers called off their weeklong protest against government plans to deregulate the industry and the cost of fuel tax. The strike ended after the government agreed to meet most of the demands of the truckers, with the exception of a reduction in taxes on fuel.

Some 40,000 owners and drivers of trucks began the indefinite strike, which had a severe impact on the Greek economy, one week ago. It is estimated that half the petrol stations in Greece were forced to close during the dispute.

One of the main reasons behind the protest was a proposal of the government to introduce a new system granting truckers licenses for free. Currently truck drivers receive lifetime operating licenses for a single one-off fee. The truckers feared that the new system would lead to the eventual deregulation of the industry, reducing hauling fees and penalising those who had already paid for their license under the previous system.

Truckers in Spain continue protests over fuel prices

Thousands of truckers in Spain held a three day strike this week in their ongoing protest over the cost of fuel taxes. Truckers are also calling for a 10 percent increase in tariffs from their contractors as well as government concessions on fuel tax and loans.

Hundreds of drivers blockaded the border with France for a second successive day on October 3. The blockades were mounted at the two main border points—La Jonquera in Catalonia and Irun in the Basque region.

The truckers blockaded many of the major highways and roads throughout Spain. They drove at walking speed along the highways causing long queues of traffic. The area around Valencia on the eastern coast was particularly hit by the action. Taxi drivers in various regions actively supported the strike. In Madrid taxi drivers stopped work for several hours in Madrid, Seville and other cities. The taxi drivers' association

said that its members' earnings had been reduced by 20 percent because of increases in fuel tax and petrol prices.

The action had a widespread impact as auto manufacturers Opel and Nissan were forced to halt production at their Spanish plants due to a shortage of parts for the production of vehicles. Mercedes Benz also reported that it would have to stop production at its plant in the north of the country because of the shortage of components for its vehicle production..

The government has been meeting with representatives of the truckers during the strike and talks were continuing as of October 4.

Truckers hold Europe-wide protest over number of hours worked

On October 2, two hundred truck drivers from the Netherlands, France, Belgium and Luxembourg mounted road blocks around Luxembourg in a protest over the amount of hours they work. The truckers blockaded roads in Luxembourg as it was the venue of a meeting of European Union transport ministers on the same day.

The protesters were demanding a set a limit on the number of hours long-distance drivers can work each week. Drivers are demanding amendments to the EU's Working Time Directive of 1993. In the directive, road transport is excluded from legislation which limits the maximum working week in most industries to 48 hours.

Rail workers in France strike over pay, demand 35-hour week

On September 28, rail staff in France took strike action for 24 hours in a dispute over pay, more jobs and to demand more progress on implementing the mandatory 35-hour workweek.

The SNCF state rail authority said that the strike resulted in only one in four suburban trains in the Paris region running normally and that one in eight trains operated on major national routes. Only one in nine trains ran as scheduled on the Paris-Nantes and Paris-

Lyon commuter routes.

German railway workers strike to demand pay increase

Rail workers struck in Germany on September 28 to demand an increase in pay. The strike affected more than million commuters in all of the major cities, including Essen, Dortmund and Dusseldorf, Dresden, Magdeburg, Rostock, Frankfurt and Munich.

The strike was called by the Transnet union who are now in talks with the German railway authority, Deutsche Bahn in order to reach a settlement.

South African miners on strike for higher wages

Miners at six Anglo American Platinum Corporation (Amplats) mines in the Northwest and Northern Province, have been on strike since September 18 in support of their demands over wages and working conditions. Initially about 5,500 workers were involved, but numbers have since increased up to 10,000.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) is demanding a 10 percent increase, including 1 percent for the miners' provident fund. Amplats pays a 14 percent contribution to some sections of the workforce and the NUM is seeking "equalisation". Amplats insists that the provident fund and demands over working conditions fall outside the present dispute.

Union members employed in the Amplats processing division are planning to take strike action in support of the miners. Amplats has warned that this would violate a Labour Court interdict granted the company on September 20.

The company is accusing strikers at its Rustenburg mine of intimidation, claiming they are stoning vehicles entering the mine premises.

Comoro teachers boycott classes

Teachers on the island of Comoro, 100 kilometres west of the northern tip of Madagascar, have boycotted classes since the beginning of a new school year, in response to a strike called by the Union of Primary and High School Teachers. The action is in protest against salary arrears stretching back to 1997. Teachers are owed five months wages for this year alone. They are also demanding the removal of a promotion freeze in the civil service imposed 1994.

The strikers accused the government of not respecting an agreement signed in March in which they undertook to ensure that salaries would be paid regularly in 2000.

A member of the teachers' committee said, "Schools will not resume in this country unless, within a month from today [Monday], all outstanding salaries for 2000 are paid in full,"

Mbaye Toimimou, secretary-general of the Education Ministry, has dismissed the strike as illegal because, according to him, the teachers did not give the required notice.

Striking teachers boycott anniversary parade in Ogun

State civil servants and public primary schools boycotted Nigeria's 40th Independence Anniversary Celebrations in Ogun State, in protest against the non-payment of their salaries. The teachers have been on strike for over two weeks demanding the implementation of the new minimum wage approved by the federal government. The civil servants were demanding payment of their July salary.

The ceremony, which was to have been an "epoch making event, was attended by some top government officials, few individuals and the private nursery, primary and secondary schools who conducted the march past..

Before the event, the government issued a circular instructing the entire state work force to attend the celebration, but it was disregarded.

While addressing the gathering, the governor of Ogun State, Olusegun Osoba, condemned the striking public primary school teachers whose attitude he described as unfortunate and unfair. "It is condemnable that no public primary school participated in this parade. The teachers have denied the children of this wonderful opportunity. I don't know what they would teach the children."

Osoba said his administration would no longer tolerate indiscipline and insensitivity of any kind from the state's workforce and called on parents to intervene in the crisis.



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