

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

9 November 2000

British Eurotunnel drivers to strike in union recognition dispute

Eurotunnel train drivers in the UK are to hold five one-day strikes in the run-up to Christmas in a dispute over union recognition. The strikes are to be held on November 20 and 27 and December 4, 11 and 18 and will severely disrupt rail services through the Channel Tunnel. The announcement was made on November 3 by the train drivers' union Aslef.

The strike is the latest development in an ongoing campaign over union recognition by Aslef. Last summer management of Eurotunnel granted the Transport and General Workers Union the sole right to represent the staff of the company. Aslef has opposed this and insists that it should represent the train drivers.

Ford UK workers to be balloted on strike action

Autoworkers at Dagenham, Ford's biggest UK plant, are to be balloted on strike action. Auto unions called the strike ballots following Ford's decision to end vehicle assembly at Dagenham in 2002. Mass meetings are to be held at the plant on November 15 to vote on industrial action.

Following a meeting with national union leaders and David Thursfield, the president of Ford of Europe, he confirmed that production of the Fiesta model at Dagenham would end as planned. It has been estimated that 4,000 direct jobs and a further 4,000 indirect jobs will be lost when Fiesta production ends in early 2002. At present Ford is currently seeking 1,300 redundancies at Dagenham.

Ryanair pilots vote to strike in working hours dispute

Pilots employed by the Irish airline Ryanair voted heavily in favour of strike action this week. The pilots voted to strike by a majority of 76 to one in a dispute over working hours.

The pilots union IMPACT, which says Ryanair is reneging on a 1994 agreement that limited the

maximum weekly working hours of pilots to 50 hours, called the ballot. Ryanair intends to increase the maximum to 55 hours. IMPACT has stated that the latest five-year offer of the company does not clearly address the issue of working hours.

The union is to meet again on November 9 to discuss the strike ballot result. IMPACT assistant general secretary Michael Landers said, "They may go for an immediate action or co-ordinate with the British Airline Pilots Association who have yet to be balloted and are a few weeks behind."

Johannesburg municipal workers to strike

The South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) and the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union (IMATU) on Monday announced they would embark on a programme of industrial action on November 15 and 16 to protest against Greater Johannesburg's iGoli 2002 privatisation programme.

In a joint statement the unions say: "There are no benefits at all that one can see two years into the unilateral implementation of the plan." The unions said they had tabled notices to strike after conciliation efforts with members of the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council (GJMC) failed.

The council has so far privatised Metro Gas and Rand Airport as part of iGoli 2002. The Johannesburg Zoo, the Civic Theatre, the fresh produce market and the Metropolitan Bus Company have also been transformed into limited companies, with the GJMC as their sole shareholder.

The unions said they were in possession of a secret council document indicating that in the past financial year, the council had spent almost R30 million (R7.62 = \$1US) on private consultants. They also said they had information that French conglomerate Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux would take over Johannesburg's water and sanitation services. They had received information from sources inside the private water industry that the only way for Suez Lyonnaise to make a profit would be to

make drastic cuts, and accused the company of carrying out such practices throughout the world.

South African petrol pump strike continues

10,000 petrol pump attendants in South Africa on strike for a 13 percent pay rise could now be joined by 50,000 workers in car repairs, car dealers, manufacturing and spare shops. A meeting between the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMIO) and the National Union of Metalworkers of SA (Numsa) this weekend failed to resolve the petrol pump dispute and Numsa say they will call out the other workers. The union have so far limited action to lunch hour demonstrations in a build up to a one day strike. They are also organising a march in Gauteng on November 14.

Although the South African government have approved an increase in petrol profit margins, the RMIO have continued to refuse a rise to the pump attendants. A Numsa spokesman said that the attendants often earned as little as R25 (about \$3) for a twelve-hour day and had to work Sundays and public holidays. As well as the pay rise they were also demanding overtime payment, a night shift allowance, and a two-day rest period.

Dentists to join doctors' strike in Nigeria

The Nigerian Medical and Dental Consultants Association are set to join the strike by Nigeria's resident doctors next week. General Secretary of the Association of Resident Doctors (ARD) at the National Orthopaedic Hospital, Igbobi, Lagos, Dr. Adedamola Dada hinted that the consultants, who have been trying to mediate between the striking doctors and the Ministry of Health, would now review their positions.

The consultants, along with some other health workers, have been offering skeletal services in affected hospitals since the resident doctors stopped work on September 13, around eight weeks ago. Some patients complained to journalists about the state of the hospital. The number of surgeries performed per week has fallen from 30 to less than five since the strike started.

The doctors dismissed an appeal made by the Health Minister to return to work last Thursday. They restated that they would only resume work if a reliable authority signs an agreement with them, and are appealing for President Olusegun Obasanjo to become involved in the dispute.



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