

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

1 December 2000

Greek workers protest against government labour reforms

Workers throughout Greece began a week of industrial action on November 27, called by the public service federation Adedy. The federation is protesting over proposed government changes to labour laws and reform of operating rules at public hospitals. Adedy has 200,000 members in the public sector nationwide.

On the first day of the protest, Greek doctors employed at public hospitals began a 48-hour nationwide strike. Ambulance and public insurance fund workers took action in support of the doctors, along with refuse collectors in the capital, Athens.

The following day, civil servants, schoolteachers, aviation employees and air traffic controllers took strike action. The air traffic controller's action disrupted flights at Athens International Airport. Olympic Airways, the national airline, announced that it was limiting domestic and international flights to one per destination.

The government has stated that the changes are necessary to reduce unemployment and create job security.

French dockers strike

On November 28, French dockers ended a 24-hour strike over pay, which had partially closed the Port of Calais and disrupted ferry services across the Channel. The workers voted to end the strike following discussions with their employers. They agreed to hold further talks on the issue of pay. During the industrial action, Dover-Calais freight sailings were diverted to Zeebrugge in Belgium.

Cabin crews in Norway strike over flight schedules

Norwegian cabin crews employed by the Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS) began strike action on November 27. The crews, members of the Norwegian Cabin Attendants Union, are in dispute with the airline over the scheduling of flights and flexibility.

The action began following the breakdown of talks the previous evening and resulted in the grounding of 160 domestic flights.

The union said that another 24-hour strike on domestic and international routes would be called if its demands were not met. The SAS has threatened to lockout the staff until a contract is agreed to its satisfaction.

Eurotunnel train drivers strike over union recognition

Eurotunnel freight shuttle train drivers held a second 24-hour strike on November 27, in a dispute over union recognition. The train drivers' union Aslef, which is opposed to the single union deal Eurotunnel has signed with the Transport and General Workers' Union, called the action. The drivers held an initial 24-hour stoppage the previous week and plan to hold another three over the next month. Drivers on the Eurostar channel tunnel passenger service are not involved in the dispute.

BBC World Service journalists strike

BBC World Service journalists walked off the job on November 25 in a dispute over pay and conditions, disrupting scheduled news programmes. The journalists were due to strike for 48 hours, but returned to work the following evening to cover the American presidential election.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) called the action. The NUJ is calling for the age at which staff can choose to opt out of night-shift work to be reduced from 55 to 50 years, for a shorter week for night workers and increased night-shift payments. A BBC spokeswoman said that no talks were scheduled with the union and that they hoped to resolve the issue without further industrial action taking place.

Sierra Leone health workers strike

Thousands of public health workers have gone on strike, closing down hospitals and health centres. In a three-page letter, members of the Sierra Leone Health Services Union (SLEHSA) state that the health

authorities have turned a deaf ear to a list of serious grievances. The letter refers to the “pathetic condition” of some workers, who are paid \$11 and others who have remained unpaid five years after training. Other grievances include non-payment of stipends, salary arrears, and a pay freeze for waged workers. The strike took place even though it interrupts the mass polio vaccination taking place in the country.

South African petrol pump attendants reject pay deal

Petrol pump attendants, now on strike for over a month, have rejected an offer of a three percent wage increase by the retail motor industry. National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa spokesman Hosea Morapedi said: "It is a poverty wage offer." The 10,000 workers are demanding a pay rise of 13 percent. At present they earn as little as R25 (about \$3) for a 12-hour day.

White-collar oil workers halt production in Nigeria

Members of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers' Senior Staff Association (Pengassan) began indefinite strike action on Monday, following a breakdown in negotiations between union officials and employers' representatives. The workers are demanding a higher minimum wage in line with that set for public sector workers earlier this year.

Office workers at the five multinational oil companies in Nigeria—which operate joint ventures with the state Nigerian Petroleum Corporation—have joined the strike. There are reports of picketing at the headquarters of Chevron and Shell and it is expected that the strike will spread to oil export terminals and drilling rigs. Although oil companies claim that loading and production will be maintained with skeleton staff, the union expects to close down the industry—which accounts for more than 90 percent of Nigeria's export earnings and supplies eight percent of US consumption. Already there are long queues at filling stations in Lagos and fuel shortages are expected throughout Nigeria.



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