

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

14 December 2000

Council staff in London, England strike against job losses

Council workers employed by Hackney Council in London are to take strike action for one day on December 20. Staff voted overwhelmingly for the strike to protest against the council's plan to cut jobs as part of a package of spending cuts.

The workers are members of several unions including the Transport and General Workers Union and the general union GMB. A GMB spokesman said that all major council buildings would be picketed during the strike and that further strikes were being planned.

Irish teachers to begin weekly industrial action

High school teachers in Ireland are to take strike action in the New Year to demand 30 percent increase in pay. The strikes will involve around 17,000 teachers in every region of the country from January 15 and will disrupt examinations from February.

The proposed strikes are the latest action in a two-month dispute by members of the Association of Secondary Teachers. The teachers have already held two one-day strikes and other action involving a suspension of work outside the classroom.

Charlie Lennon, the ASTI general secretary said, "In January, they will be escalating the action by a series of rolling one-day strikes throughout the country on a regional basis and they have decided to withdraw from examination work from February onwards."

The Irish Education Minister Dr Michael Woods has stated that teachers' pay would only be settled within the terms of an existing national pay agreement.

Hungarian health care workers continue strikes over pay

Health care workers across Hungary staged a series of nation-wide warning strikes and demonstrations last week to protest against "miserable" financial conditions in their sector. The strike involved nurses at 28 hospitals and clinics who have held two-hour warning strikes and several protests since December 7.

The Democratic Union of Health Care Workers (EDDSZ) called the strike. EDDSZ leader Agnes Cser said, "With this series of actions, we want to warn parliamentary deputies prior to the vote on a two-year budget that the budget plan fails to finance a pledged wage rise and projects the collapse of patient care. This is the last moment before the collapse. The budget in its current form would not finance the running of hospitals".

Hungarian doctors and nurses are amongst the worst paid employees in the country. State-employed doctors regularly accept tips from patients to make ends meet.

A vote on the budget for the next two years, drawn up by conservative Prime Minister Viktor Orban's coalition government, is due in Parliament this week.

Polish nurses stage sit-in at Health Ministry

500 Polish nurses entered the Health Ministry in Warsaw December 5 and began what they called "an indefinite sit-in" to demand wage rise demands. The action is the latest in a dispute that has affected services at 125 of Poland's 700 state-run hospitals.

The nurses have called for an immediate average rise of 500 zloty (\$114) a month to wages which now range from 500 to 1,500 zlotys. They have also demanded further increases next year.

Longina Kaczmarek, a spokesman for a health union involved in the protests said, "The government should take responsibility for the financial troubles of the health sector and for the fact that desperate nurses are leaving patients' beds".

Following recent legislation that made changes in the funding of medical provision, the government has said that pay levels are up to managers of hospitals and health care funds that run medical units. However the majority of managers say they simply do not have enough money to fund pay increases.

The government says no pay increases are possible this year, but has offered nurses a 4 percent real increase in wages next year.

The dispute once again highlights the government's continuing problems with the major reforms to pension, education and health systems which it introduced soon after the start of its term in 1997 - since when they've become increasingly unpopular.

Strike brings Central African Republic to a halt

Civil servants and other workers on strike in the Central African Republic for the second time in recent weeks have brought the country to a halt. The striking workers initially ended their protest, which had begun on 2 November, but then downed tools again at the end of last month. Over 10,000 people have taken part in marches through the centre of the capital Bangui.

Reports from Bangui say most shops and business have closed, and there is little traffic other than police patrols. Both the police and the army have been put on a state of alert.

The civil servants are calling for the payment of twelve months wages; some are owed as much as thirty months back pay. The UN Integrated Regional Information Network has reported that a "social implosion" may result unless the money is paid.

Workers at Zimbabwe Newspapers still on strike

Striking workers at the financially troubled Zimbabwe Newspapers (Zimpapers) Group have now been offered annual bonuses of 90 percent of their salaries instead of the 40 percent that triggered the strike last week. The workers said that despite calls by the Information and Publicity Minister to end the strike on the strength of the new bonus offer, no decision on ending the strike had been made. They are demanding 100 percent bonuses.

Meanwhile, the chairman of the workers union of Zimbabwe Newspapers Harare branch, Matthew Takaona, quit his post on Thursday. Journalists had accused Takaona of working in cahoots with management.

Zimpapers has been losing money as circulation figures decline due to its pro-government stance.

Nigerian oil union opposes strike

The strike by workers at TSKJ, a major construction company for the Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) project, is continuing, despite opposition from their union. Last month, junior workers belonging to the National Union of Civil Engineering Construction, Furniture and Wood Workers (NUCEFWW) Bonny branch went on unofficial strike against the employers'

practice of over-deducting income tax from their wages.

In a letter by the NUCEFWW national secretariat in Lagos to the TSKJ juniors and all other workers employed by sub-contractors at the NLNG site, the union expressed its disappointment at the strike and urged a quick return to work.

The union said in the letter: "Our attention has been drawn to the strike action embarked upon by our members in the employment of TSKJ and other sub contractors working in the NLNG expansion project in Bonny. We wish to inform you that we are greatly disappointed at your decision to embark upon this strike action without reference to the union headquarters."



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