

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

4 January 2001

## **Train drivers strike in union recognition dispute**

On December 28, Eurotunnel freight train drivers in England staged the first of five 24-hour walkouts in a dispute over union recognition. The drivers, members of the Aslef train drivers union, are protesting Eurotunnel's decision to sign a single union deal with the Transport and General Workers Union. The deal includes train drivers who are Aslef members.

Aslef has announced that four further strikes will take place each Monday over the next month. The dispute is not affecting Eurostar train services through the Channel Tunnel.

## **Postal workers strike in Liverpool, England**

Postal workers at Liverpool's West Derby sorting office in Merseyside took strike action on December 29 as a result of the inclement weather conditions. The strike involved 70 postal staff and stopped deliveries to West Derby, Croxteth, Broad Green and Stockbridge Village. Workers said that the bad weather made it impossible to deliver mail safely. The Royal Mail employed managers to make collections from post boxes.

## **Czech government steps up pressure on journalists**

Journalists on strike at a Czech television station in the capital, Prague, have been forced to present their identification papers to police.

The journalists began their sit-in at the Czech TV newsroom just before Christmas in response to the appointment of the station's new director, Jiri Hodac. The striking reporters argue that the appointment was politically motivated and Hodac will take a pro-government line. The new director won support from the country's two largest parties, including former Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus' Civic Democratic Party.

On December 25, Hodac arrived at the TV newsroom accompanied by five policemen and began inspecting the identification cards of approximately 40 reporters. The move was organised on the pretext that only

employees of the TV station were allowed on the premises.

Protesting reporters were told they were free to leave but would not be allowed to return. The journalists used a ladder from the second floor window in order to evade security guards. A mobile toilet has also been brought through the window to allow the protesters to continue their demonstration inside the newsroom.

The protest has spread to other departments of the television building and organisers claim to have two-thirds of the station's 3,000 employees supporting the strike. The journalists have won considerable public support and thousands have been gathering in front of the television station each evening. One news agency reported that although only about 200 showed up on the New Year's Eve, more than 100,000 people have signed a petition in support of the protestors.

The Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists has also supported the strike. The union represents more than 450,000 journalists in 100 countries.

## **Romanian workers strike over derogatory Christmas bonuses**

Workers at the Azomures film production factory in Tirgu Mures, Transylvania, began strike action on December 22 in protest at their Christmas bonus that consisted of a glass of orange juice and a biscuit. Some of the 500 workers pelted managers with eggs.

A similar strike took place at the SC Zinbru clothes factory in Suceava, north-eastern Romania. The 300 staff employed by the company began strike action after they were offered a pair of pyjamas as a Christmas bonus. The workers have not been paid any wages since August.

The workers booed and jeered as the manger of the factory addressed their annual Christmas meeting.

## **Polish nurses end sit-in at the Health Ministry**

On December 29, 100 Polish nurses ended their sit-in at the Health Ministry offices in Warsaw. The sit-in had

lasted 18 days and the nurses immediately joined protesting colleagues outside the building to continue a strike for better pay.

The sit-in ended after the nurses' union accepted the government demand that no talks would be held until the nurses left the health ministry building. Union spokeswoman Sabina Malyszko said the union wanted to give the government another chance.

The nurses are demanding an increase of 500 zlotys (130 euros, 117 dollars) a month. The current average monthly wage is only 700 zlotys. The government's offer of a 12 percent increase was rejected by the nurses, who maintain that it is nearly impossible, especially for single mothers, to live on their salaries.

Public support for the nurses is widespread, with nine out of 10 Poles supporting their demand for a pay increase according to a survey released last week by the CBOS polling institute.

After a meeting with the nurses last week, President Aleksander Kwasniewski said that he would examine all their reservations concerning a bill granting all health employees a 203 zloty (\$49) [per month] wage rise. Nurses and midwives are demanding an increase of their basic wages to 1,400 zlotys [about \$350 per month].

### **Nurses go on strike in Malawi's hospitals**

Malawian nurses began a strike on December 24 to press for improved conditions of services in the nation's hospitals. The strike followed a stalemate in discussions with the government on improving nurses' welfare. Nurses are also demanding higher pay and better working conditions, including overtime and risk allowances. The nurses have been unhappy since the government stopped offering free housing to civil servants in a budget-cutting exercise. Free housing is now limited to doctors and top civil servants such as those in the security forces.

The strike has taken the authorities unawares. The president of the Nurses Association of Malawi, Georgina Chinula said that the association did not sanction the action. "Those who are striking are doing so individually," she said.

### **Striking Civil Servants in the Central African Republic halt trial of oppositionists**

Civil servants in Bangui, Central African Republic have been taking strike action over non-payment of wages—in some instances for as long as 12 months. A

dispute by court clerks—on strike since last November—has held up the trial of oppositionist demonstrators. The 73 opposition activists, including four members of parliament, were arrested on December 19 for holding a rally to protest growing economic instability and to call for the resignation of President, Ange-Felix Patasse.



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