

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

25 January 2001

## **Finnish port workers begin nation-wide strikes to support sacked colleagues**

On January 22, more than 3,500 dockworkers at Finnish ports began strike action in support of their 31 sacked work colleagues. The dockworkers are members of the Finnish Transport Workers' Union. The strike began following a breakdown in talks over the weekend between unions and management.

The 31 were originally dismissed last year, and according to the dockworkers, they did not receive sufficient compensation.

It has been estimated that the strike could affect some 75 percent of all exports and cost 600 million markkaa (\$94m) a day in lost revenue.

Port employers have declared the strike illegal and said that it violates an agreement reached last week with union representatives.

Further talks on the dispute between the union and port management took place later that day under the supervision of the government-appointed national conciliator Juhani Salonius.

## **European GM workers to hold joint demonstration against British plant closure**

Last week, Vauxhall autoworkers at the company's Luton factory in Bedfordshire, England held a demonstration against the proposed closure of their plant. More than 10,000 workers from the plant as well as other autoworkers employed by Ford and Rover marched through Luton to protest.

On January 25, a European-wide "day of action" by workers at Vauxhall's parent company General Motors is to be held in a number of countries in support of the British workers. GM workers in Germany are expected to take some form of industrial action, while Vauxhall workers in the UK are likely to take mass sick leave for the day, since anti-union laws prohibit them participating officially.

The Vauxhall workers are to be balloted next week for strike action in protest at the decision to end car production in Luton. The strike ballot will also include

workers at Vauxhall's other site at Ellesmere Port on Merseyside. The result of the ballot is expected in early February.

## **Fuel tanker drivers in UK to be balloted for strike action over pay**

British tanker drivers who deliver fuel for Shell are to be balloted for strike action in a dispute over pay. The workers are to begin voting in a strike ballot on January 25, following their rejection of a proposed two-year wage deal from the company.

The drivers are employed by P&O Trans European and drive about one sixth of the country's fuel tanker fleet. They are calling for a pay rise of 5 percent, while P&O Trans European is offering an increase of just 2.5 percent on basic pay.

The result of the ballot, which involves several hundred workers, is expected in mid-February.

## **Journalists' trade union proposes to end Czech TV strike**

A proposal has been put forward by the journalists' trade union to end their month-old strike at Czech state television. Journalists at the station began their protest last month over the government appointment of Czech Television (CT) boss Jiri Hodac.

The strikers have continued their dispute despite the eventual dismissal of Hodac, as they allege there is still overt political interference in their broadcasting.

This week, the head of the main CMKOS union, Richard Falbr, called on network management to "no longer give work" to two executives - news director Jana Bobosikova and finance boss Jindrich Beznoska, who were both appointed by Hodac.

In a letter to the network's legal director Vera Valterova, who has been running the station since Hodac's departure on January 11, Falbr also proposed the cancellation of a number of sackings made by Hodac.

The journalists have maintained that Hodac has close links to the right-wing Civic Democrats (ODS) of former Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus. The dismissal of Bobosikova and Beznoska remains the key demands of

the journalists.

### **General Strike in Benin**

Workers belonging to four main union confederations in Benin went on strike for 72 hours beginning Tuesday this week. They were demanding a reduction in the price of oil products and a halt to the privatisation of several public sector industries.

The workers are determined to press their case after gaining no response in the government's budget for 2001, voted through in December.

Last week a march organised by the Benin National Union of Students ended in violent clashes with the police. Students were demanding an increase in scholarships and an improvement in conditions.

With a foreign debt of \$1.6 billion and a population of less than six million, Benin has been under IMF structural adjustment policies since 1989. The IMF classifies it as a "moderately indebted low income country," rather than a severely indebted country, even though a quarter of government revenue is spent on debt repayments. Annual income per capita is estimated at \$380.

### **Post and telecommunications workers strike in Gabon**

A nation wide strike of the National Union of Post and Telecommunications Workers began Tuesday. Their demands were for better working conditions including increases in housing and travel allowances and an improved salary scale.

### **Strike of council workers in Kabwe, Zambia**

Municipal workers in Kabwe, a zinc and lead mining area 100km north of the capital Lusaka took strike action demanding payment of four months salary arrears. The stoppage began a week ago and is continuing.

Civic centre buildings have been locked up as a result of the strike and are defended by the paramilitary police against protesters. Gravediggers on strike have resulted in mourners digging graves themselves. Garbage is piling up leading to fears that the cholera outbreak that has so far killed nine people over the last month could worsen.



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