

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

1 March 2001

Belgium Internet Service Provider staff strike against job losses

World Online staff in Belgium took strike action last week in protest at the company sacking half its workforce.

The action began on February 20 and members of staff posted updates about the dispute on a website. Readers were asked to send e-mails in support of the sacked workers and to protest against the actions of World Online. The strike ended on February 27 without any of the workforce being reinstated.

Forty-five workers have been made redundant since the Belgian Internet Service Provider was taken over by Tiscali last December. Eighty-five people will remain working for World Online in Antwerp.

Teachers in England vote for action over staff shortages

On February 27, it was announced that schoolteachers in the National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women have voted for industrial action to protest against staff shortages.

The action will take the form of teachers providing "no cover" for unfilled posts and staff absences of longer than three days duration. The industrial action is set to begin in April. The action will be held initially in London and Doncaster with further ballots being held in other cities including Portsmouth, Southampton, Leicester, Middlesborough, Nottingham, Kent, Manchester and Reading.

There was a low turnout in the ballot with just 30 percent of teachers voting. Of those more than 90 percent backed the "no cover" proposal.

Some 1,000 of the estimated 3,000 primary and secondary schools where ballots have been held are expected to send children home during the action due to lack of teachers to take classes.

Vauxhall workers in England take strike action to protest plant closure

Vauxhall autoworkers in England took strike action on February 23 for the second time in an ongoing dispute.

Workers at Vauxhall's plants in Luton in Bedfordshire and Ellesmere Port in Cheshire held the one-day strike in protest at the planned closure of the Luton vehicle assembly operation.

Those on strike are members of the Transport and General Workers Union. Members of other unions at the plants refused to cross the picket lines during the strike. The action had a widespread impact with no cars built at the Luton plant and only about half the normal number of cars being built at Ellesmere Port.

The dispute continued over the weekend of February 26/27 when the TGWU and the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical staged an overtime ban.

Israeli teachers union agrees to delay strike action

The Secondary School Teachers Association agreed last week to a Knesset Education Committee request to postpone a threatened strike and give the Treasury another week to come up with a formula for compensating them for salary erosion.

According to the union, teachers are offered starting salaries of NIS 3,000 gross and they earn an average of roughly NIS 5,500 after 15 years' seniority. It has been estimated that teachers' salaries decreased 8.6 percent in value in 1996 and a similar amount in 1997, and that this means teachers are owed an average of an additional month's salary.

The teachers are demanding that the Treasury publish the tables that show how much their wages have been eroded due to inflation between 1996 and 1998. The Treasury said that a mediating committee had not yet come up with a figure, despite months of work. The mediators were appointed as a solution to a 1996 court

battle between the Secondary School Teachers Union and the Treasury over the wage-erosion issue.

Likud MK (Member of Knesset) Ze'ev Boim denounced the teachers for issuing a strike threat before negotiations were launched. He said, "I am angry about having to walk this Via Dolorosa. We have all in essence acquiesced or gotten used to the fact that strikes just have to erupt. Has anyone ever really considered what every strike costs our society?"

Junior doctors down tools in Ghana

Junior doctors at the Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital (KATH) in Kumasi, Ghana, stopped work last week to demand their allowances for extra duties, which have been in arrears since December 2000. They are also pressing for fuel allowances, which their colleagues at Korle Bu and other health centres in the districts have already received.

The situation is aggravated by the fact that most of the junior doctors have not received their basic salaries after graduation. The doctors feel they are being taken for granted, since those in the military, police and banks receive better incentives and conditions of service.

The doctors have said their strike action will continue until their demands are adequately met. They have also demanded that allowances from the previous month should be paid by the 25th of the following month and that this payment pattern should be sustained to lessen their problems in the absence of regular basic salaries.

Construction workers' strike in Ethiopia

A strike by construction workers in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, has paralysed the work of the MIDROC construction company that is building the Organisation of African Unity conference centre. The workers went on strike Monday February 26 over benefits and the right to form a union. The strike involves almost 2,000 workers employed in building the centre, which is due for completion in mid-May, as well as two other construction sites in the city.

The labour dispute began on December 5th 1999 when some 1,800 workers of the MIDROC construction company—part of the Saudi Arabian Mohammed al Amoudi conglomerate in Ethiopia—established a union after hundreds of their colleagues had been fired for being “activists”. A demonstration of MIDROC workers and others in support of those sacked was held in Addis Ababa on

October 8th 2000. Subsequently six of the union leaders who had referred to management as, “an authoritarian [body] that refuses any negotiation with the union,” were fired for giving a press conference.

Tariku Tadesse, secretary of MIDROC labour union, told journalists that 728 contract and 115 permanent workers out of the 1,800 that had formed the union have been illegally fired since December 1999. “The aggregate violations of rights culminated in a strike by the initiative of workers themselves. The strike was not even called by our labour union or CETU [Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions],” he said.

The dismissed union leaders and "activists" argue that since the right of workers to organise in unions is written in the country's constitution, the labour and social affairs ministry should help to settle the dispute. CETU, which says it supports the industrial action, is also calling for immediate action by the government to uphold the rights of the striking workers.



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