

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

12 April 2001

Greek journalists hold nationwide strike

On April 9, journalists throughout Greece held a 24-hour strike to demand better working conditions. Thousands of journalists were involved in the strike that has affected dozens of broadcasters and publications.

Greece's major television and radio stations were forced to cancel news programmes. All of the country's main newspapers, as well as the state-run Athens News Agency, were hit by the strike. Internet sites and stock market reports were also disrupted.

The Athens Journalists Union, representing some 2,000 members, called the action. Other smaller journalists unions were also involved. The journalists are demanding a five percent pay rise, as well as extra pay for those who have university degrees. The union is also calling for collective wage agreements to include all journalists, regardless of the media in which they work.

Rail workers in Holland strike against new work schedules

Rail workers in Holland struck for two days from April 4 in a dispute over new work schedules. The nationwide strike left thousands of commuters stranded and millions more had to travel on gridlocked roads.

Rail staff are opposed to a new scheduling system that will restrict workers to the same routes, instead of giving them varied routes across the country. The strike was the second on the rail in four months. One of the unions due to be involved in the strike, the Union of Engineers and Conductors, called off their participation three days prior to the action. The union that did strike, FNV Bondgenoten held talks with management but was unable to reach agreement with the company.

Nederlandse Spoorwegen, the railway company, announced that two thirds of its staff did not report for work during the stoppage and that just a handful of trains were kept running between the five biggest cities. The Union of Engineers and Conductors said that it was

considering a further 48-hour work stoppage from April 10.

French rail workers continue strikes

French railway workers continued their strike last week. The workers are opposing the privatisation of the SNCF national rail company and calling for a pay increase. The strike continued on April 6 and affected many services during the beginning of the spring break holiday in France.

SNCF Management offered rail workers a 1.2 percent pay rise, but the rail unions rejected this.

Transportation Minister Jean-Claude Gayssot has called for the unions to end the dispute.

Chad-Cameroon pipeline workers strike

Some 140 employees laying pipes to convey Chadian oil from Dowa to Kribi in Cameroon went on strike last week in the locality of Nkongmeyos, in Cameroon's Centre Province. The strikers want a wage hike from 159 francs CFA an hour to 250 francs CFA, and a 150 percent increase in daily food ration from 1,000 francs CFA to 2,500 francs CFA. (1,000 francs CFA = US\$1.35) They also want job guarantees and a halt to arbitrary and unfair dismissals.

Press accounts say that the local district administrator has now mediated a compromise. The strikers have agreed to resume work, after being promised a 27 percent salary increase, and guarantees that they would keep their jobs for the full eight-month project on the pipeline near Nkongmeyos.

The Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline, built by a consortium led by US oil companies ExxonMobil and Chevron, is strongly opposed by human rights and environmental protesters. Costing \$3.7 billion, the 1,100 kilometre long pipeline will take oil from Chad to the coast, passing through tropical rain forests, threatening tribal communities and endangering the environment. The World Bank approved a programme last June that will provide \$365 million in financing for the scheme to the governments of Chad and Cameroon

and to the oil consortium.

Ugandan parking attendants strike over conditions

Workers of Green Boat Entertainment Ltd., the company controlling and managing street parking in Kampala, went on strike last week, in opposition to deductions from their salaries and other infringements on their agreed conditions.

About 500 parking conductors wearing green jackets and red caps set off from the Constitution Square at 9:00am on Monday, and took to Kampala streets, holding tree branches and their receipt books, in protest at the flouting of their contracts.

The workers complained of a 10 percent deduction from their monthly pay from sh125,000 to sh100,000 as savings to be paid to them at the end of every year. (sh100, 000 = US\$55.25). They have not received the money for over three years. Also they were protesting that the daily pay of sh4600 for a full day is exploitative.

“There are no public holidays, and management does not actually recognise us as part of the company,” said one striker. Complaining that they worked for 10 hours daily, another angry striker said at the rally in City Square, “We are not going to continue being treated like dogs. We are given just passion juice and a bun for our lunch and many of our colleagues have been unfairly dismissed.” The strikers said they were working without job security, appointment letters and identity cards and face spies in the workforce.



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