

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

15 November 2001

Royal Shakespeare Company staff to strike

RSC staff working at the Barbican theatre in London have voted by nine-to-one in favour of strike action against the closure of the theatre and job losses.

The strike action will affect upcoming performances of *Hamlet*, *King John*, *Twelfth Night* and the black comedy *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. The strike will also halt the production of *Alice in Wonderland*, which the RSC had hoped would be a major box office success.

The workers are opposed to plans by artistic director Adrian Noble to abandon the Barbican location altogether, where the RSC has based its London productions for more than 20 years. Noble also plans to make changes in Stratford-upon-Avon, the home of the Royal Shakespeare Company. The RSC has made plans to demolish the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford and build a new “theatrical village” on the banks of the Avon. The Royal Shakespeare Theatre is presently a listed building and the plan has been criticised by heritage groups.

The technicians’ union Bectu has said that as many as 60 jobs could go in the restructuring.

Professional soccer players in England vote to strike

Professional soccer players have voted for strike action in a dispute over the amount of money that is granted to the Professional Footballers Association (PFA).

The footballers from the Premier League (the leading English clubs) and the three lower divisions voted by a margin of 99 percent in favour of strike action. The ballot revealed that just 22 players out of 2,312 professional footballers voted against. The dispute arose because the Premier League has ended a traditional agreement, under which a five percent share of revenues from television broadcasters—primarily Sky Sports—was given to the PFA to fund the various activities it carried out on behalf of players. The PFA

estimates that a five percent share of the current TV deal would entitle the union to £25 million.

The Premier League said that the five percent agreement was never formally put in writing and has instead offered the union £10 million. Leeds United chairman Peter Ridsdale—a leading figure in the Football Association, the governing body of English football—warned players that they would be in breach of contract and may have their salaries stopped if they take strike action.

On November 11, following the result of the strike ballot, the PFA and the Premier League met, but without reaching a settlement. The PFA is expected to propose the first dates of the strike very shortly. The ballot called on players to refuse to participate in televised matches after November 23. The proposed strike has won support from many leading figures in the game, such as Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson, as well as many ex-players, some of whom had to retire from the game because of injury and had their operation and health care bills paid for by the PFA.

Radiographers strike in North Wales

On November 14, radiographers employed by the North East Wales NHS Trust held a one-day strike in a long-standing dispute over pay and conditions. Nineteen workers are involved in the dispute and are members of the Society of Radiographers. The staff plan a further 48-hour strike for next week.

The dispute centres around the radiographers’ request in 1999 to be re-graded, based on their experience levels and training. The trust has yet to implement such a scheme and has said the radiographers’ claims will be addressed at national level and not locally.

Nigerian local government workers’ strike continues

Nigerian local government workers are continuing their national strike against the federal government’s policy of deducting teachers’ salaries from the finance

allocated to local councils. The National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGA) said the strike would go on as long as the federal government failed to address the issue of “zero allocation” to local councils. In Abuja, the union reported that all local council workers in the federation had joined the strike, which had been continuing more than two weeks.

The union spokesman insisted that “deductions for teacher salaries should be made before the sharing of revenue to the three tiers of government and not from the local councils shares that leaves them with nothing.” The Federal High Court has ruled against the deduction of teachers’ salaries and allowances from local councils’ monthly statutory allocation. Although the federal government has not challenged the ruling, it has failed to comply with it.

Nigerian public sector workers strike over salary deductions

Public sector workers in Borno State, Nigeria, have been on strike for a month, over a 17 percent deduction taken from their salaries and the non-implementation of the minimum wage agreement—which was reached last year for workers in the state.

During minimum wage negotiations in 2000, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) had agreed to what was effectively a massive wage cut, by sanctioning the withholding of 17 percent its members’ wages. They claimed it was “an interim measure, pending improvements in the finances of the Borno State government”. Union officials now complain, “This concession has not been applied to elected office-holders who have continued to draw their pay fully despite a fantastic perks regime.” They insist that there has been a “phenomenal improvement in the finances of the state”.

In an attempt to restore its credibility with its membership, the NLC has threatened that from this week it will paralyse all government activities in Borno State—including shutting down aviation operations, cutting petroleum products supply and ensuring the media blackout of the state government—unless the back-wages are paid.

DR Congo miners strike over unpaid wages

Thousands of miners in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are on strike to protest against the non-payment of their wages by a series of joint venture companies involving the government and trans national

corporations. The miners, who work in the southern Congolese province of Katanga, began their strike on November 5.

The largest of the protests took place in the DRC’s second city, Lubumbashi. More than a thousand angry miners and students demonstrated on the streets in protest that the state-run company Gecamines had cut all their benefits and had not paid them for five months. The workers crowded the state governor’s office and harried the visiting Minister for Human Rights. Strikes and other protests took place at the same time in other mining towns in the southern province.

The President of the Gecamines Trade Union Association, Prosper Kahoba, said the action would be stepped up unless the situation is changed, adding that workers were incensed that a series of high profile joint ventures with international mining companies had brought them no benefit.

Since the late 1980s, Gecamines’ profits have collapsed, as corruption, incompetence and under-investment have left its mines in disrepair. The company is at the centre of a complex web of interests, involving multinational companies, the government’s military allies, arms dealers and members of the Katangese elite, including some senior government ministers.



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