

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

22 November 2001

Professional soccer players in England to hold first ever national strike

On November 20, the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) in England announced that its members would hold their first ever national strike commencing December 1. The PFA's chief executive Gordon Taylor said that the stoppage would affect all league games with television cameras present, both for live broadcasts or recorded highlights. Effectively this means that all top-flight games will be hit, as TV cameras are present at them all.

The ballot for strike action won the virtually unanimous support of players from both the Premier League (the leading English clubs) and the three lower leagues. Over 99 percent of players voted to support the strike ballot.

The dispute arose because the Premier League has unilaterally ended a traditional agreement, under which a five percent share of its revenues from television broadcasters—primarily Sky Sports—was given to the PFA to support the various activities it carried out on behalf of players. These include the funding of medical treatment for injured players. The PFA estimates that a five percent share of the current TV deal would bring in an estimated £36 million per year. During negotiations preceding the strike announcement, the Premier League offered the PFA £50 million from the television revenues over three years. This was rejected by the PFA.

The first game to be hit by the strike will be the league fixture between Manchester United and Chelsea, scheduled for a midday kick-off on December 1.

Both the Football Association (the governing body of English football) and the Premier League condemned the strike announcement. The Premier League has called the proposed strike illegal and is seeking a High Court injunction to prevent it happening.

This week, Peter Ridsdale, chairman of Premier League team Leeds United and a leading figure in the Football Association, said that if Leeds United players participated in the strike, the club would not pay them. He said, "We have no choice but to say that you will not be paid

because the wage money comes from TV money" and added, "we have to consider legal action. It is not an industrial dispute".

Radiographers in north Wales continue strike in pay grade dispute

On November 21, radiographers in north Wales began a period of industrial action in a longstanding dispute over pay and conditions. The workers are employed by the North East Wales NHS Trust and are demanding that their employers implement a 1999 request to be re-graded, based on their experience levels and training.

The 19 workers began the 48-hour stoppage at the Wrexham Maelor Hospital. Two Radiographers are to be on standby to cover any emergencies that may arise during the dispute. Last week the workers held a 24-hour strike.

Scottish electronic workers to be balloted for strike against plant closure

Workers employed by FCI electronics in Scotland are to be balloted for strike action, to oppose closure of the company's operations in Port Glasgow and Queenslie.

The factory is split across the two locations and some 136 jobs could be lost if the closure proceeds. The two main trade unions representing workers at the plant are the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) and the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (AEEU).

This week, an ISTC spokesman said that its members had requested to be balloted for "industrial action up to and including strike action." The union has also said that the company was refusing to negotiate with it.

ISTC Organiser Alan Pottage said, "Our members have been totally frustrated by FCI's refusal to consult with their union. Indeed, the frustration is not confined to ISTC members, over 75 percent of shop floor employees have signed a petition calling for FCI to consult with the union over the redundancies. This includes ISTC members, non-members and other trade union members.

"If the management does not respond to the employees' wishes for the ISTC to be consulted, then the ballot could result in the workers at both sites taking official industrial

action for the first time ever.”

A spokeswoman for FCI said that it was only negotiating with its “recognised trade union—the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union—and with elected staff representatives.” The spokeswoman said that the company had been in talks for some 3 weeks with the union.

Police shoot strikers in Nigeria

At least nine workers have been shot by police while protesting against the withholding of their wages by the regional administration in Borno State, Nigeria. Four of the workers, who were shot at close range, were seriously wounded and are receiving treatment in the intensive care unit of the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital. One of them is in a critical condition.

The workers were shot on Thursday last week by police from the Borno State Police Command in Maiduguri, as they demonstrated against the governor’s breach of a previous pay agreement. Twenty-seven were also said to have been arrested.

Borno State Police Commissioner, Alhaji Uba Ringim, has imposed a state of emergency, saying, “we will deal with anybody involved in violence.”

After a display of token opposition to the shootings, including a claim that the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) was going to make Borno State “ungovernable”, the President of the NLC, Adams Oshiomole, brokered a deal between the workers and the state government, calling off the five-week-old strike. Oshiomole demanded that the police commissioner be sacked, declaring that there would now be an “anti-Ringim” strike every Friday. Attempting to turn the anger of workers against the government into a vendetta against the police chief he demanded action against Ringim’s family: “We will identify any school or workplace where his children or wife may be schooling or working and they will be excluded.”

The strike was launched to demand that state governor Alhaji Mala Kachalla made payment of arrears arising from the minimum wage agreement June 2000, payment of leave bonuses for 2000 and 2001 and the restoration of deductions of 17.5 percent and 20 percent being made from higher-paid workers’ salaries. According to Oshiomole, the government would now “strive to meet their demands.” It has agreed to pay the outstanding arrears for June 2000 salaries by the end of December this year and to settle the leave bonuses by January 2002. The deductions are to continue but at the lower rates of 9 percent and 13 percent.

Local government workers continue strike in Nigeria

Nigerian local government workers are continuing their strike, now in its second month. Members of the National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) in Kano State joined the strike at the weekend.

The National President of NULGE, Dr. Deji Akinwalere, said, “The total number of councils indebted to workers within the range of 1-21 months is 285 of the 774 councils nationwide and the amount involved is over N8.3 billion (\$74.8m).” NULGE leaders likened the government’s handling of the strike to that of the previous military regimes.

Workers in Namibia sacked for two-day strike

Over 100 workers who took part in a two-day strike at a supermarket in September last year were dismissed at a disciplinary hearing held Friday November 9. The local official of the Namibia Wholesale and Retail Workers Union (NWRWU), Hambira Mate, said the union would proceed with an appeal against the verdict.

Originally, 119 workers were cited for being involved in the strike, at a supermarket chain called Woermann and Brock’s. The company then admitted that some of these had been on leave at the time of the strike. After the ruling, managing director Woermann justified the sackings on the grounds that the strike was illegal and that the company had lost \$106,000 during the strike.

Workers began their strike on September 21 and continued until the following day. The courts ruled that the action was illegal. The workers had gone on strike after 17 fellow employees were suspended without pay on August 16 for refusing to work late without prior notice. The strikers said that the 17 employees had arrived at work at 8 o’clock in the morning on August 16, only to be told to return at 11 o’clock to work a later shift. Because they refused to comply with this, they were suspended without pay, triggering the strike.



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