

# Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

20 December 2001

## **Romanian morgue workers strike**

On December 12, workers at the Brasov mortuary in Romania began an indefinite strike to protest against having to work in freezing conditions with no hot water. The morgue employs four doctors, who have stated that they will not complete post mortems until their demands are met. The staff have been attempting to resolve this dispute with the authorities since the summer.

The morgue workers state that their main requirement is access to hot water to wash bodies, as temperatures often fall well below freezing in the mortuary. A spokesman for the workers said, "We can't work properly with cold water while it is 15 degrees below zero outside as well as inside the morgue. These are not working conditions. We won't carry out autopsies until our situation is resolved."

## **Ferry workers in Scotland begin strike in pay dispute**

On December 18, ferry workers employed by Caledonian MacBrayne on the Clyde river in Scotland took strike action disrupting services on three main routes: Ardrossan-Brodick, Wemyss Bay-Rothesay, and Gourock-Dunoon.

A regional Rail, Maritime and Transport union organiser stated on December 17, "We have moved considerably from our demand for parity for both groups. Now we are seeking parity for the seafarers with their counterparts in the Western Isles. For the 30 [Clyde] pierhands we would accept consolidation of their pay... all ancillary payments such as overtime, lieu days, bonuses and such like. So far that has been rejected, so we have moved again. We have asked that the company consider a reduction in the working week. An able seaman on the Clyde earns about £13,000 while an able seaman in the Western Isles earns about £20,000."

The managing director of Caledonian MacBrayne condemned the strike and claimed that the company

had offered the Clyde ferry workers a 3.5 percent pay rise for this year and a further 3.5 percent next year. He added that the same offer had been recommended for acceptance by the RMT to its members in the Western Isles and three other sections of our employees.

## **Rail workers in southern England set to strike after rejecting pay deal**

Platform staff employed by South West Trains are to hold strike action over the Christmas/New Year holiday period in a dispute over pay. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union is set to announce the result of a strike ballot shortly, and to set dates when industrial action will commence. More than 2,000 workers were balloted by the RMT and could be involved in any strikes held.

The platform staff are understood to have rejected a 3.8 percent pay offer, claiming they have been presented with an inferior deal to that offered to the company's train drivers.

The law obliges the union to give seven days notice of any strike action, and it is expected that the first strikes could be held between Christmas Day and New Years Day.

South West Trains operates one of the busiest rail routes in the UK, with more than 100,000 commuters using its services each day. The company stated that the higher pay deal for its drivers was also linked to productivity improvements and claims that the RMT has refused to discuss the issue of productivity in its pay talks for platform staff.

## **Nigerian company sacks 600 workers for striking**

Six hundred employees of Dangote Industries Limited have been laid off from the Apapa Cement Terminal in Nigeria after taking strike action.

In a memo dated December 3, the workers were informed "that their services are no longer required by the company..." The memo instructed them to collect their final entitlements from the accounts department. Dangote management immediately advertised the posts of the sacked workers.

The workers deny Dangote's claims that they had damaged company equipment or manhandled any staff. Speaking on behalf of those affected, Mr. Musa Taofeq told reporters that the workers had only staged a peaceful protest in support of their demand for better conditions of service.

The 600 sacked workers lobbied the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) National Secretariat, at Yaba, Lagos last weekend, demanding the NLC to intervene on their behalf against what they said was "tantamount to victimization."

At the lobby, Taofeq informed the media that two of the workers had died recently after inhaling chemicals, because they had not been provided with the necessary protective equipment for dealing with such hazards. He said that workers at Dangote Cement Terminal were subject to serious health hazards, and that they were "used as slaves".

### **Nurses on strike in Nigeria**

A national strike by Nigerian nurses and midwives is now in its second week.

Earlier this month, National President of the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives, Chief Pat Enembolu Eze, had announced that nurses and midwives in government hospitals where July 2001 salaries have still not been paid were to embark on a full scale strike. The affected hospitals include: Usman Dan Fodio University Teaching Hospital (UDUTH), Sokoto; all hospitals owned by Kano State government and others.

Nurses at other locations will restrict themselves to conventional duty, and will not engage "in any form of shift duty whatsoever." This, Eze said, would continue until government implements the payment of 60 percent of basic salary as shift duty allowance to nurses.

In one hospital, Dr. Nasiru Saidu, said that because of the strike, it was very difficult to continue to allow the patients to stay in the hospital without proper care and attention. "Doctors alone cannot manage the situation because all nurses, midwives, medical and health workers have joined the strike," he said. He explained that the only patients now being admitted were those with very serious cases and patients with minor ailments have been discharged.

The Federal Ministry of Health had signed an agreement with the nurses on July 27, 2001, which the

association says the government has reneged on.

### **Steel workers in Zimbabwe strike against low pay**

Over a thousand workers at Zimbabwe's leading iron and steel manufacturer, the Kwekwe-based ZISCO, went on strike last week for higher pay.

Joshua Sibalo, the ZISCO workers' committee chairman announced on December 13 that the workers would begin their strike the following day. "We gave two weeks notice of our intention to go on strike from tomorrow and we are going ahead," said Sibalo, adding that morale at the steel giant was low because of the poor salaries.

The state-owned steel corporation is desperately trying to raise more than \$8 billion on the international market. It claims it is faced with collapse if it fails to raise the funds to cover its operational costs. The money is needed to maintain the ancillary plants and to buy spares for steel refractories within the company.

### **Senior staff fired for joining union in Ghana**

The Ghanaian company Pioneer Food Cannery (PFC) has fired 18 senior staff who threatened to go on strike to compel management to allow them to join a trade union.

About 40 senior staff at the factory had decided to join the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). Of these, 18 had signed a letter to the management, saying that they would go on strike if they were not allowed to join the ICU.

On December 3, the management responded by summarily dismissing those who had signed the letter, barring their entry to the factory the following day. Since then, junior workers have warned management to reverse their decision or face further action.



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