

Workers Struggles: Europe, the Middle East and Africa

7 February 2002

Rail workers in northern England continue strike action over pay

Rail workers employed by Arriva Trains Northern continued their campaign of industrial action this week, with a 48-hour strike on February 5 and 6. The action was the latest in a dispute over train conductor's pay. Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union said this week that the union had sanctioned strike action every month, until the dispute was resolved. Just under a third of scheduled services ran normally.

Rail staff at South West Trains to step up action

Rail workers employed by South West Trains, in the south east of England, are to step up their recent campaign of industrial action by holding four days of strike action next week. Two 24-hour strikes are to be held from midday on February 11 and a further two days of action are to be held from February 13. The company said it will run more than half of its normal 1,700 scheduled services during the strike and will use approximately 650 buses at rail stations as alternative transport. The buses are being brought in from all over the country. In a further attempt to break the strike, SWT is replacing striking workers with managers.

Finnish bank strike escalates

Bank tellers employed at Nordea in Finland began strike action on January 31, in a dispute over a productivity drive. The strike initially closed all of the bank's branches in Helsinki, Kuopio and Turku and involved 1,300 Nordea employees. On February 4, the strike spread to include the bank's branches in the towns of Espoo, Vantaa, Kauniainen, Kirkkonummi, Tampere, Jyväskylä, Oulu, and Vaasa. Striking workers, members of the financial sector union SUORA, also called on all workers at the bank nationwide not to work any overtime.

The strike began following the decision of the bank to introduce property and casualty insurance policies at its

branches, which will increase the workload of the staff that have to process the insurance sales. The union claims that the company has been unwilling to enter talks.

Pilots' union at Irish airline moves to call off strike

On February 5, pilots at Aer Lingus in Ireland called off a one-day strike planned for February 11. The pilots' trade union, Impact, voted to call off the strike after the airline agreed to withdraw compulsory redundancy notices issued to 10 junior pilots. The 489 pilots had voted by a margin of 97 percent in favour of industrial action. Aer Lingus has stated that it still requires 80 fewer pilots.

One day strike in Israel against health cuts

30,000 employees of the Kupat Holim Clalit Health Maintenance Organisation (HMO) took 24-hour strike action on February 4. The strike was in protest against the sacking of 500 workers from employment agencies—physical therapists, nurses in local clinics and administrative and maintenance workers. The strikers were also protesting against the HMO's decision to limit overtime that will reduce earnings.

A Clalit spokesperson said that measures were necessary because the HMO faces a severe financial crisis following the Finance and Health Ministries' decision to cut NIS 600 million (\$US129.45 million) from the state's health spending over the next three years.

Strike halts sackings at Israel's Pi Gllot Gas Company

The strike at Pi Gllot Gas Company against the planned closure of two fuel depots, the sacking of 40 out of 180 workers and a 20 percent cut in wages has been called off after four days. The company agreed to freeze its planned dismissals and pay cuts for three months.

Pi Glilot supplies 70 percent of gasoline and diesel fuel to Israel's gasoline stations. The strike, which began on January 31, closed fuel supply depots around the country. It also affected the supply of cooking gas to Pazgaz and Amisragaz, which store their supplies at the Pi Glilot site in Herzliya.

Pi Glilot blames its planned cutbacks on the state price control committee, which recently decided to introduce a new "infrastructure" price schedule (applying to storing and issuing of fuel) from February 1. Pi Glilot argues that the new prices encourage gas companies to transport fuel in dangerous fuel trucks, rather than use underground pipelines.

Nigerian anti-privatisation strike halted by the courts

A strike called by the National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE) against the privatisation of the Nigerian power supply industry has been halted by a court injunction. The Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) obtained the legal ruling in the Lagos High Court.

NUEE has called on the court to strike out the BPE lawsuit. Their spokesman insisted, "Section 40 of the 1999 constitution gave us the right to go on strike and to say we can't go on strike would be an infringement of our fundamental rights." The union said the strike action would be directed against the employer, the National Electric Power Authority (NEPU) and therefore the BPE has no legal right to bring the action. Council for the BPE will give his reply on February 22.



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