

# Workers Struggles: Europe, the Middle East and Africa

14 February 2002

## **Transport workers strike in France to demand lower age of retirement**

On February 7, public transport workers in France struck for 24 hours in an ongoing dispute demanding the right to retire at 55 years of age. The strike was called by four transport workers' unions and affected many public transport services in around 40 cities, including Strasbourg, Cannes, Lille and Nice. A delegation of several thousand workers held a demonstration in Paris. One of their main demands was that talks be held with the Transport Ministry in order to resolve the dispute.

In Toulouse in the south of France transport workers blocked two bus stations with picket lines. In Lille all buses and trams had ceased to operate. In the city of Reims, near Paris, more than half of all scheduled bus services were cancelled. In Strasbourg just 17 percent of its buses and 30 percent of its trams were operational.

Some transport workers in Paris organised sporadic stoppages in support of their colleagues nationally. Under current legislation workers have to wait until they are 60 before they can retire. However, in Paris transport workers can choose to retire at 50.

## **Rail workers dispute continues in northern England, but is suspended in the south**

Rail workers employed by Arriva Trains Northern, based in the north of England, are to hold further strikes in their ongoing dispute over pay. Workers are set to strike for 48 hours on March 1 and 2. The Arriva workers most recent 48-hour strike was last week.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) is also involved in a dispute with South West Trains (SWT) in the south east of England. The strike centres on a pay dispute, disciplinary procedures and job security. On February 7, the union and SWT management held what was described as a "positive"

meeting and the following day the union's executive suspended further strike action in the dispute pending more talks with SWT. The union had planned a further two 48-hour strikes.

## **English Heritage staff to be balloted for industrial action**

Staff employed by English Heritage, the national body that maintains and oversees many monuments and tourist attractions such as Stonehenge and Battle Abbey, are to be balloted for strike action. Some 500 workers are to be balloted by their trade union, Prospect, in protest about the imposition of a pay increase of just 3.5 percent.

English Heritage and Prospect have negotiated low pay deals in the past on the basis that these would only be temporary. Steve Jary, a member of the union's negotiating team, admitted, "Previous modest pay settlements have been agreed by the unions on the basis that there would be 'jam tomorrow', at least in terms of a fairer pay system. But despite previous reviews and last year's commitments, no concrete progress has been made." English Heritage has stated that the deal on offer is non-negotiable as it faced a "financially challenging" year ahead.

## **Striking Nigerian teachers offered backpay taken from other services**

Secondary school teachers in Anambra State, Nigeria, on strike for five months over non-payment of their salaries and allowances, have forced a concession from their employers. The Anambra State House of Assembly has unanimously decided that the outstanding amounts should be paid and ordered the money to be taken from elsewhere in order to end the strike. It has asked Governor Chinwoke Mbadinuju to suspend all funding for capital projects in the state to provide the necessary funds.

The Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) has declared

that no amount of pressure will make them call off the strike until all the arrears of salaries and allowances have been paid. The union's attitude to the source of the money used to do this is not yet known.

On February 11, the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria organised a demonstration calling on the state government to pay the teachers. It was attacked by anti-riot policemen, who shot teargas into the crowd. The police said that they were following orders from the state governor.

### **Workers storm the Lagos State Secretariat**

Last Friday February 8 workers at the Nigeria Carton and Packaging Company (NICAPACO) stormed the Lagos State secretariat, Alausa, to protest the unjust sacking and arrest of some of their colleagues following allegations that they celebrated the destruction of company premises during the January 27 bomb explosions.

The protesting workers carried placards, some of which read, "Release our detained workers, Nigeria Police", "NICAPACO, Release our members arrested unjustly".

Moses Kekeosha, speaking on behalf of the workers, told PM News that on February 4 management sacked one of the workers, Mr. Omoredion, over the issue. Kekeosha said the allegations were baseless and that a union inquiry had shown that the sacking was because of Omoredion's union activities. He stated that the company had earlier wanted Omoredion to resign from his job, adding that the workers decided to protest when all appeals to the management to see reason fell on deaf ears. Instead, management called the police who arrested many of the workers.



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