

Workers Struggles: Europe, the Middle East and Africa

21 March 2002

Teachers hold day of action in London to demand increase in cost of living allowance

On March 14, more than 3,000 teachers demonstrated in the centre of London as part of a campaign to demand an increase in the cost of living allowance granted for living in the capital.

Up to 1,000 schools in the city and surrounding areas were wholly or partially closed as a result of the action.

Teachers are calling for a 33 percent increase in the cost of living allowance. The government has instead offered the teachers an increase of 3.5 percent.

The action was organised by the National Union of Teachers, which pointed out that a Metropolitan Police officer receives a cost of living allowance of £6,000 and that an increase for teachers in line with their demand would take their allowance to just £4,000.

Tram drivers in northeast England set to strike

Tram drivers in the northeast of England are due to hold a series of six one-day strikes in April and May in a dispute over pay. The workers, members of the drivers' union Aslef, are employed on the Tyne and Wear Metro and have been offered a pay increase of just 3.8 percent. The strikes are to be held on April 2, 8, 15 and 22 and May 3 and 7.

Workers anger was fuelled when it was revealed that a senior executive at Nexus, the company that runs the Metro service, had received a 10 percent increase in pay. This week, the union issued a statement on the proposed industrial action saying, "Tyne and Wear Metro drivers are fed up with being among the lowest paid in the country and are angry at the inflated rises paid to management."

The Tyne and Wear Metro will shortly run a new service from Newcastle to Sunderland and the opening of this route is due to be marked by a visit from the Queen. The workers are set to hold the last of the one-day strikes on that day. The chairman of the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Authority has used this as a pretext

to attack the staff. Nexus said that would now be contacting the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service in a bid to resolve the dispute.

French dentists begin series of rolling strikes

Dentists in France began a series of rolling strikes on March 18 that will involve workers from a number of regions taking action in a weekly rotation. The strike was called by the CNSD trade union (Confédération nationale des syndicats dentaires), which is an amalgamation of some 99 regional organised trade unions. The confederation represents 18,000 dentists, more than half of all the dentists in France. The dentists are demanding a reevaluation of the payments that are charged for their services.

Main German union calls warning strikes in pay dispute

The IG Metall engineering and metal workers' trade union in Germany announced on March 18 that its members in Bavaria would begin a series of warning strikes on March 29. IG Metall said several thousand workers would be participating in the strike.

The action was announced following the refusal of employers in Bavaria and Thuringia to improve on a pay offer that employers in Baden-Württemberg had presented to the union on March 15. The Gesamtmetall, the Baden-Württemberg branch of industry association, offered a pay increase of just 2 percent and the associations in Bavaria and Thuringia matched this.

The union is calling for a wage increase of around 6.5 percent. This demand has been rejected by employers. Heinz Greiffenberger, the chief negotiator of Gesamtmetall, said, "In Bavaria, one plant in five is running at a loss."

In Thuringia, IG Metall has called a state-wide demonstration on April 4 to be followed by a warning strike on April 8. In the state of Baden-Württemberg, the union has announced that warning strikes will begin on April 8.

Strike action could begin as soon as next week in the eastern German states of Saxony, Brandenburg and Berlin. In those states the union is currently in talks with employers who are offering the 2 percent pay increase. The union has stated that if this offer is not improved, then warning strikes will begin from March 25. This is the date on which the legal obligation to refrain from industrial action during the talks expires in eastern Germany.

Israeli broadcasting workers strike in pay dispute

The Israel Broadcasting Authority (IBA) has suspended programmes on Channel One television as of March 20. The IBA employees are striking in protest of a unilateral decision made by television administrator, Yair Aloni, to move the IBA offices in Beit Kalka, Tel Aviv to a different building. The step is the latest in an ongoing dispute linked to the refusal of the departing director-general, Ran Galinka, to pay overtime salary due to IBA employees.

In line with previous discussions, the employees made the move to the new building conditional on the installation of an elevator, parking arrangements, and a freeze on decisions made by Galinka regarding levels of seniority among employees. Aloni said that he “decided today to instruct the moving company to come at seven in the morning and transfer all IBA property.... If they want to strike, and they don’t understand the position of the IBA, let them strike.”

Nigerian civil service workers protest against non-payment

Workers made redundant from the Lagos state civil service staged a protest at the state legislature and secretariat in Ikeja on March 18, demanding the payment of money owed to them by the government since February last year.

The Council of Industrial Unions (COIU) issued a statement, saying that the workers were restarting their protests after the expiry of a week-long “grace period” requested by the speaker of the house, Olorunnibe Mamora. COIU chairman, Mr. Ayodele Akele said that it was “regrettable” that State Governor Chief Bola Tinubu had laid off more than 15,000 workers. He said he was turning on those who elected him into office.

South African telecom workers hit by job cuts

The South African privatised telecommunication company, Telkom, announced on March 18 that it is “shedding” 367 posts. This follows a “landmark” agreement on job security and retrenchments signed with the Communication Workers Union (CWU), which the

union sold to its members as an alternative to job losses.

The company has given the workers until the end of the month to apply for voluntary early retirements or severance packages, or they will be “subject to compulsory redundancy from April 1”.

The company stated that it had consulted with the unions before making the announcement. The union disputes this and has threatened court action or a strike. Since March 1999 more than 21,000 jobs—over a third of the total workforce—have been eliminated at Telkom. The company will face competition later this year when a second national telephone company enters the market. They are also bent on cost cutting in preparation for being listed on the stock market later this year

Armed paramilitaries force striking Zambian journalists back to work

On March 15 armed paramilitary officers forced striking journalists back to work to produce that day’s edition of the *Times of Zambia*. The soldiers went to the homes of the strikers and forced them to return to the offices of the newspaper in the city of Ndola, in northern Zambia.

The strike began on March 14 in protest against delayed payment of salaries and management incompetence. Strikers in Lusaka locked out managing director Emmanuel Nyirenda in protest against his alleged bad management of the company. The newspaper is owned and controlled by the government.

A Zambia Union of Journalists (ZUJ) spokesman said members of staff refused to meet management because they had discussed the same problems many times, without anything being changed. She said the workers are demanding the suspension of Nyirenda, the finance manager, the human resource manager and the director of operations since they had all failed to perform. She spoke of severe cash flow problems, and levels of intimidation that meant employees had left in order to escape from it.



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