Workers Struggles: Europe, the Middle East and Africa

28 March 2002

Transport workers strike in Lyon, France

On March 20, a strike of more than 4,000 public transport employees was held in Lyon, France to demand an increase in pay and extra holiday time. The strike was called by the CGT, FO, Autonomes, CFTC and CFDT trade unions and involved workers on the bus, tram and metro network. A futher strike was held on March 22 as the transport companies refused to enter into negotiations. They offered a pay increase of just 1.6 percent.

Public transport workers normally serve 1.2 million passenger each day in Lyon.

Transport workers in Marseilles, France strike after worker is attacked

On March 25 some 3,000 transport workers in Marsellies held a two hour strike to demand the increased safety of public transport workers. The short strike was called by the local CGT and FO trade unions. On March 23 two men tried to set a bus driver on fire by dousing him in petrol.

The attack in Marsellies is the most recent in a number of attacks on transport workers in several towns and cities.

French nurses continue campaign to demand better pay and conditions

For the past two weeks 120 nurses have held a protest outside the regional health assurance scheme office of Saint-Brieuc in the Cotes-d`Armor. The nurses, many of whom visit the homes of very ill people, are opposed to an agreement between the management of the national health assurance scheme (CNAM) and the nurses' trade union SCI (Syndicat Convergence Infirmière). The nurses are demanding more pay as they have not benefitted from a pay increase in real terms for 14 years. The nurses have not signed the new contract. Nurses in the other nurse trade union federation FNI (Fédération nationale des infirmières) also have not endorsed the new agreement.

Philips workers in Holland to strike

Workers employed by the Dutch electronics company Philips Electronics NV are to strike for 24 hours on March 28. The strike is set to involve around 29,000 staff in sites across Holland. The workers are calling for a 3.5 percent pay increase, but the company is only offering a 2.5 percent rise. The workers are members of the FNV and CNV trade unions. A spokeswoman for the FNV union said, "There has never been such a massive workers' action at Philips in the Netherlands". Philips is Europe's largest maker of consumer electronics and lighting and is number three in the production of semiconductors.

Manchester airport workers in England strike over job losses

On March 22, workers at Manchester airport in the north west of England held a 36-hour strike in protest at planned job cuts. The strike was the latest in a long-running dispute. Workers are concerned that the planned job losses will have a detrimental impact on security at the airport. The strike was called by the Transport and General Workers Union, who claimed that they had recently put forward new proposals, aimed at resolving the dispute but that the airport management had not responded. A further four-day strike is planned over the Easter holiday period, pending a resolution of the strike.

Romanian teachers strike for minimum wage

Over 350,000 teachers from across Romania staged a one-day strike last week to campaign for a minimum wage of £40 a month. The average monthly wage in Romania is around 3.6 million lei, or £80, but the basic teaching wage is just £24. The strike was organised by the main teachers' trade union, the Alliance of Education Unions (AEU). A spokesman for the AEU said that the government's recent offer of a five percent

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rise was insufficient.

Inflation rose to 30 percent last year and is expected to be just over 20 percent this year. Since 1989, teaching—like other professions—has suffered a terrible decline. Most teachers need to supplement their incomes by giving private lessons.

Government threatens nurses in Kenya over planned strike

Nurses in Kenya, who are preparing to take strike action over their poor salaries and working conditions, have been told they will face being sacked and replaced with new graduates. Around 30,000 nurses are expecting to be called out on strike from April 2.

The national chairman of the Kenya Health Professional Society (KHPS), Robert Osiemo, said the root cause of the strike is the government's refusal to heed the demands of health workers. Government officials were fully responsible for the planned nurses strike for the 450 percent salary and allowances increments, he said, because they had ignored a previous nurses' protest over these issues in 1997.

Basic items of equipment for a hospital, such as gloves, drugs and computers, are lacking, conditions are substandard, and the nurses have to cope with many unnecessary risks. While the World Health Organisation (WHO) advocates a ratio of one registered nurse to 20 patients, in Kenya the ratio is 1:70, and it is especially bad at district hospitals. As a result, the nurses are forced to work long hours.

The basic salary for a newly-qualified nurse employed by the Public Service Commission is only Sh6,000 per month ($US77.47), or a fifteenth of the salary of an Enrolled Nurse in South Africa (which is itself much less than salaries in the developed countries), and a thirtieth of the salary of a South African Registered Nurse. Risk and medical allowances for senior nursing officers are Sh400 and Sh900, respectively—a negligible amount.

This year, the government announced an increase in salaries and allowances for doctors and surgeons, but paramedics were excluded from the settlement without any explanation being given. The minister for medical services, Hussein Maalim Mohammed, responded to the threat to strike by saying, "The nurses will be sacked if they do not give us time to work on their terms of service since their grievances are already being considered."

Nigeria: Obasanjo attacks lecturers

Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo attacked university lecturers for taking part in a week-long strike, beginning March 18. The BBC World Service reported Obasanjo saying that strikes had brought Nigerian universities to a state of near-paralysis and were damaging the reputation of the degrees they awarded. The strike, which spread to most universities, was held to protest the sacking of 60 lecturers at the University of Ilorin, dismissed for taking part in a strike over pay in May 2001.

Lecturers belonging to the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) have taken a series strikes in the recent past over their poor pay and the lack of funding for university facilities.

A separate strike of members of the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) has continued since November 26, 2001. The union has refused to call off the strike until the government agrees to a number of conditions, in particular a 22 percent increase in basic pay, back-dated to May 2001.

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