

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

25 April 2002

## **Greek workers hold protests against social security reform**

Public transport and other workers held a 24-hour strike in Athens and other Greek cities on April 23.

More than 2,000 workers including hospital staff, taxi drivers, middle school teachers and a number of employees in other sectors took part in the Athens demonstration to protest the government's planned reforms of the social security system. During the protest the main subway line connecting Athens with the port of Piraeus was closed all day and services on the other metro services were halted for the morning rush hour. Many national train and urban bus services in Athens were also affected by the strike action.

## **French Airbus workers hold pay strike**

Workers employed by the Airbus group at four plants in Nantes, Saint Nazaire, Toulouse and Méaulte held a strike on April 18 in a dispute over pay. The strike was of a short duration and lasted from 9.30 am until 12.00 pm.

## **Transport workers in Nancy, France reject pay deal**

On April 22, public transport workers held a strike in the town of Nancy, after rejecting a pay agreement signed by the CFTD trade union and the transport authorities.

The strike was organised by the CGT trade union. During the industrial action the strikers blocked the bus depots but not the tramways—allowing only 28 percent of the normal traffic to run. On April 23, a demonstration was held in front of the local authority building.

## **British firefighters set to strike in pay dispute**

Firefighters in the UK could be set to strike following a decision by the Fire Brigades Union to call for an increase in workers' wages to £30,000 (US\$ **43,476.00**) a year. Firefighters currently earn an average of £21,531 per annum.

The salaries of firefighters are based on a formula that

was introduced 24 years ago after the last national strike. The union has stated that the formula is "well out of date." The demand for an increase in firefighters wages to £30,000 a year and a new pay formula will be presented to employers on April 26.

## **Arriva rail workers in England to hold further strikes**

On April 19, the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union announced that there would be a further 48 hour strike by its members employed by Arriva Trains Northern in a long-running dispute over pay. The workers are to hold the strike on May 3 and 4.

Arriva Trains Northern is also currently in dispute with the Transport Salaried Staffs Association over pay and the union has announced that three 48 hour strikes will be held on April 25 and 26; May 1 and 2; and May 30 and 31. Many of the union's members are employed in ticket offices.

## **Strike action on the rise in Kenya**

At least seven sections of Kenyan workers have either taken, or have threatened to take strike action against the government and its agencies due to their failure to deliver promised wage increases.

Attendants at the City Mortuary began a strike on March 1, due to non-payment of allowances and other grievances. Workers at the Meteorological Department were the next to go on strike, due to similar issues on allowances.

At the beginning of this month, more than 1,000 Kenya Railways workers went out on strike because they were not paid for two months. Nurses had earlier called off their planned strike when the government agreed to negotiate on their demands.

A strike by air traffic controllers ended with the government sacking the strikers and replacing them with managers and retirees. The air traffic controllers earned a basic monthly salary of only Sh7, 500 (around £75), plus a housing allowance of Sh3, 500 (around £35). The government has now confirmed that all the

strikers were sacked for having “deserted duty”.

Teachers are now threatening to strike due to a failure by the government to keep to a salary agreement made in 1997.

### **South African Nissan workers strike over retirement funds**

Nearly 3,000 workers at the Nissan South Africa auto plant in Rosslyn, Pretoria, went on strike on April 16 to protest the company storing R12 million from a surplus in the retirement funds, rather than paying it to employees. The three Nissan retirement funds had made a total surplus of R245 million (11 Rand = \$1 US)

Nissan immediately went to the Johannesburg labour court, where an interdict was handed out preventing workers from taking part in the strike.

National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) spokesperson, Dumisa Ntuli, said the decision to strike had been taken by workers at the plant and not by Numsa. Numsa expected the workers to return to work this week. Ntuli said that an agreement had been reached between Numsa and Nissan SA in 2000, by which Nissan SA was to repay R12 million from the surplus back into the funds from which it had been taken. Ntuli said this was to allow increased benefits when workers retired, or were retrenched or dismissed.

The Nissan workers, however, insisted that they wanted the R12 million distributed amongst themselves, rather than being stored in the funds.



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