Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

8 August 2002

Train drivers in northern England to step up strike action

Train drivers employed by the First North Western are to hold three 48-hour strikes in a dispute over pay. The industrial action is to be held on August 13-14, August 27-28, and September 10-11.The train drivers are members of the ASLEF drivers union.

The strikes were originally called several weeks ago and then called off by the trade union after it secured a pay deal with management. This week the union reported that the company had reneged on the agreement and had "tried to sabotage an agreement on pay by attempting to impose new productivity measures on its workforce". Among the "productivity measures" pushed for by management is that drivers carry out litter picking duties during stopovers at stations.

Postal workers in England to ballot for national strike action

Postal workers are to begin balloting on August 27 for national strike action. The result of the ballot is due to be announced on September 12. The workers are members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU), representing 180,000 postal staff.

The dispute is over the employment conditions of 7,000 cleaners and engineers who are due to transfer from the national mail delivery company Consignia to a joint venture with Balfour Beatty. The union has stated that the new conditions of the workers will be considerably worse than at present and contravene agreements already established covering issues such as pensions, job security and union representation. The CWU added that it would pave the way for all postal workers to face "shoddy treatment" in the future.

Oil workers in Norway continue strike

A strike by oil workers over their latest pay claim continued this week, after August 5 talks between the oil workers union NOPEF and the Norwegian Oil Industry Association (OLF) failed to reach a settlement. The talks were held at the State Mediator's office in Oslo.

The strike began on July 5, but oil production is not being immediately effected as the strike is currently targeting maintenance and exploration services.

The NOPEF is calling for a pay increase in the region of 6.5 percent while the employers are offering a pay deal of 2.9 percent. NOPEF is also demanding that the workers work two weeks on/four weeks off rotation system that is standard in most of the oil industry. The present oil service collective agreement covers 3,500 staff, of whom 2,000 work offshore.

Norway is the world's third largest oil exporter, and produces more than three million barrels of oil a day. NOPEF is the largest petroleum workers' union in the country and represents the 412 strikers and a further 18,000 workers in the industry. A further 700 workers are set to join the action if the dispute is not resolved shortly.

Ugandan teachers end sit-down strike

Primary school teachers in several parts of Uganda went on strike at the end of July to demand an improvement in their USh4,000 ($US2.2) salary increment.

Teachers in Bunyole County in Tororo district staged a sit-down strike on July 26 to protest at the unfair salary increases announced by the Ministry of Education and Sports. The teachers complain that it is unfair for the government to increase head teacher's salaries to over sh600,000 per month when class teachers are paid less than USh150,000. The strike was later called off when Tororo district officials, led by Resident District Commissioner James Rwebembera, addressed the teachers.

Kenyan teachers demand nationwide strike

Teachers in Mombasa are demanding that national chairman of the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) John Katumanga call a countrywide strike. Katumanga's response was to deny that he had the power to do so. "I have got no powers to call a strike. It

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is the national executive council which has got the mandate to call a strike or determine the way forward over the issue," he said.

Kenyan teachers complain that negotiations between KNUT and the government have taken too long, and that they are fully prepared to strike as a means of pressuring the government for the implementation of the remaining phases of their promised salary increment.

Zimbabwean newspaper workers remain on strike

Workers at the state-controlled Community Newspaper Group (CNG), who came out on strike two weeks ago had still not returned to work last weekend. They are demanding a salary increment of 55 percent, backdated to January this year.

According to the *Daily News* (Harare), the workers have vowed not to go back to work until their problems are solved. The strike has stopped production of several publications in the CNG group, including the *Masvingo Star*, *Mashonaland Telegraph Guardian*, *Chaminuka News* and *Indonsakusa/Ilanga*.

Munacho Mutezo, chairman of the Mass Media Trust, of which the CNG and the Zimbabwe Inter-Africa News Agency (ZIANA) are part, said, "We are still working on their salaries, but we do not have a definite date that we are going to effect the increment."

The ZAINA workers' committee has given their employers until August 14 to pay their 55 percent salary increment. Last month a group of ZIANA workers disrupted a board meeting in Harare demanding an audience with Mutezo.

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