

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

13 September 2002

Airline pilots in France strike

Pilots employed by Air France held four days of industrial action between September 6 and 9. The strike followed a breakdown in talks over pay between the six pilots' unions and airline management. Trade union representatives of the pilots have called for a pay increase of between 10 and 12 percent but Air France has only offered 3 percent.

The pay strike was followed by separate action on September 12 to protest of Air France's plans to privatise the airline. The nationwide strike was the largest since the 1998 pilots' strike, just prior to the soccer World Cup.

The stoppage had most impact in Paris where the airline operates between 1,600 and 1,700 flights per day from Orly and Charles de Gaulle airports. The company anticipated that between 48 percent of European flights and 30 percent of short-distance flights would be disrupted but said no further talks were planned with the unions. Air France chairman Jean-Cyril Spinetta claimed the pilots' wage demands were unrealistic.

Norwegian oil refinery employees in dispute

At midnight on September 9, 45 workers at the Statoil-operated Mongstad refinery near Bergen began an official strike, after a breakdown in negotiations over pay between the Confederation of Vocational Unions (YS) and the Norwegian Oil Industry Association (OLF).

The dispute initially began on August 29 when the YS called a strike by 96 of its members at Esso's Slagentagen refinery and the Borealis AS plastics plant, both south of Oslo. The Esso workers rejected an initial pay offer of 6.4 percent from the company. The union wants a pay increase and a retirement age lowered to 62 for all members (compared with the national age of 67), retirement at 57 for all shift workers, and time and a half pay for all weekend work.

Vessel traffic to and from Mongstad ceased and the refinery ground to a halt during the stoppage. On

September 11, Kjetil Edvardsen, the chief union negotiator told Statoil that it planned to expand the strike to include 260 employees in the oil company's administration.

Continuing industrial action would have a wide impact. Statoil's depots can only supply the market for one to two weeks but the company has said that it will import fuel if necessary. Norway is the world's third-largest oil exporter, after Saudi Arabia and Russia.

Train drivers in northern England continue strike

Train drivers in the north of England continued a long-running dispute over pay this week. The staff are employed by First North Western, which operates rail services in the north west of England and north Wales. The action on September 10/11 was the third 48-hour strike in the last month.

ASLEF, the rail drivers union, said the action was necessary after the company reneged on a pay deal that included a 19 percent pay rise over three years.

Edinburgh bus workers to strike

More than 1,000 bus drivers employed in Edinburgh and the Lothians have voted to take indefinite strike action from next week. The drivers are all employed by Lothian Buses, the area's biggest bus operator.

Workers are demanding an unconditional 12 percent pay increase. Lothian Buses have rejected the demand as "unrealistic", offering just 5 percent.

London council workers threaten industrial action

Unions representing 100,000 council workers in the capital have issued a final warning to employers to increase the London Weighting allowance or face strike action. The workers involved include teaching assistants, social workers and refuse collectors.

The unions say that the current allowance of £1,400 to £2,600 is not enough to compensate for the high cost of living in London, where a modest house now costs £180,000. They are demanding a flat rate rise of £4,000.

Members of the UNISON public sector union have

already taken part in four days of strike action to press their claim.

Workers at Namibian fishing company threaten strike

The Namibia Seamen and Allied Workers Union (NASAWU) has accused the Marco Fishing Company at Luderitz of unfair labour practices and threatened to strike action if a planned meeting at the Ministry of Labour fails to resolve its complaint.

In a September 2 press release NASAWU official Paulus Hango said factory workers earn only \$N180 (\$US17.5) a week, assuming an eight-hour working day. Sea-going workers earn \$N20 a day plus between \$N50 and \$N62 per ton of fish caught. The union is demanding increases of 29 percent for seamen and 46 percent for land-based workers.

Managing Director Appie Louw has rejected union demands and said the company is prepared to offer increases of between 23 and 16.9 percent for land-based workers, depending on the grade, and 11.9 percent for sea-going employees.

The union is also campaigning for the reinstatement of Oscar Nekwaya; a worker it claims was unfairly dismissed. It has given the company 50 days to come up with a “decent proposal” on raising salaries.

Nigerian civil servants threaten strike action

Civil servants in Kwara State have threatened to abandon their offices from September 11, if their July and August salary arrears are not paid. The decision was taken at the workers’ congress held at the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) secretariat.

In a written statement to employers, Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) state secretary Emmanuel Akin Ayeoribe said: “The workers/pensioners expressed their general discomfiture over the undue delay of July/August 2002 salaries and pension which has subjected them to indebtedness before sundry creditors with the grave implication that they are no longer credit worthy. In view of the above, it has become extremely difficult for workers to continue to sustain their service”.

Ayeoribe insisted that “if by close of work on Tuesday September 10, 2002 salaries of workers (serving and retired) have not gotten to their pockets, as from Wednesday September 11, 2002, workers may no longer guarantee their coming to work on an empty stomach.”

Kenyan teachers’ demonstrations attacked by police

Scores of teachers and union officials from Eastern Province were among those injured when police attacked their demonstration on September 3. The attack was made on the second day of a school boycott campaign to protest against a delayed teachers’ pay rise [<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/aug2002/eta-a17.shtmlreport>].

The teachers, who are members of the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT), were attempting to protest against the arrest of Embu KNUT executive secretary John Gitari, who had called for a nationwide strike. KNUT branch chairman Caesar Munyi, executive secretary John Gitari, treasurer Caesar Mugo and two branch executive committee members, Lenson Mugane and Stephen Gathungu, later appeared in court charged with addressing an unlawful assembly.

In Embu District more than 100 teachers from various schools had boycotted classes and assembled at Runyenjes town, for a march to the local law courts where three parents from Karurumo Primary School were to be charged. The police declared the gathering illegal and ordered the teachers to disperse, beating them indiscriminately with batons and whips. According to the *Nation* (Nairobi), the police also fired in the air, causing a stampede. Civic leader Kinya Kongo was mistaken for a teacher and beaten by police.



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