

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

1 November 2002

Airport workers in Ireland vote to strike over union recognition

Airport workers in Ireland have voted for industrial action by a margin of six-to-one in a dispute over trade union recognition. The workers plan to strike against Cityjet Handling that has refused to officially recognise the SIPTU trade union in a dispute that has lasted 18 months.

SIPTU is the largest trade union in Ireland and has called for strike action to be held on October 31. The strike is expected to cause disruptions and delays at the airports in Cork, Dublin, Shannon, Galway and Knock.

The strikes are to last for three hours at the airports where SIPTU are represented.

Ambulance workers in Scotland vote in dispute over pay

On October 28, ambulance workers in Scotland voted by a majority "for action short of a strike action" in a pay dispute. Just over 78 percent of the 1,200 staff balloted voted for action short of a strike.

The workers, which include paramedics and controllers, are members of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU). They are demanding a pay increase of 5 percent this year and have rejected the 3.6 percent offer put forward by UK ambulance trusts. The union said that no decision had yet been made on the form of action it would take and has called for further talks with the Scottish Ambulance Service management over the dispute.

The public sector trade union Unison is set to hold a similar ballot of its 900 members in the Scottish Ambulance Service.

French airline pilots union calls off scheduled strike

On October 26, the National Union of Airline Pilots in France (SNPL) called off a scheduled four-day strike that was to take place November 1-4 (a holiday weekend in France).

The union has reached an agreement with Air France.

In September the SNPL held joint strike action with five other airline unions that resulted in many domestic and international flights being disrupted.

Zambian council workers strike against non-payment

Striking council workers and their families in the town of Luanshya, Zambia held a demonstration demanding the payment of eight months of salaries. Police fired tear gas canisters at the crowd, including the council workers' wives, many with babies strapped to their backs.

The strikers shouted down the local Zambia United Local Authorities Workers Union (ZULAWU) representative, who attempted to calm the mood with assurances that local government minister Michael Mabenga would issue a statement about their plight.

The council workers' action takes place only a few weeks after the workers at the Luanshya mines (now closed) clashed with police and stoned the district administrator to demand payment of their wages.

The action by the council workers and their families forced the closure of all businesses in the town to avoid looting. President Levy Mwanawasa urged the Luanshya residents to halt their action, saying it would be detrimental to attracting investment.

Nine-month council workers' strike in Nigeria called off

The nine-month-old strike by unpaid council workers in Anambra has been suspended, after the state council of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) made an agreement with the state government. The government said it would pay two months' salaries and pensions every month, including the relevant check-off payments to the union. According to the agreement, each time workers are paid their salaries pensioners are also to be paid, and leave allowances for the years 2000, 2001 and 2002 are to be paid between November 2002 and April 2003. A government/labour committee will meet every month to supervise the payment of salaries.

The two parties agreed that workers should not be victimised due to their strike activities. The agreement states that if the government reneges on its promises, “the NLC reserves the right to call out workers on strike without notice.”

There is widespread resentment towards government leaders who have been accused of diverting most of the original funds into their own bank accounts.

Zimbabwe government to sack striking teachers

The Zimbabwe government announced October 27 that it is to seek legal means of sacking up to 400 striking teachers, following the sending of letters of suspension. Aeneas Chigwedere, the minister of Education, Sports and Culture, said the government would “call for an inquiry and then conduct investigations before firing them.” He said that the reason this was necessary was that “there are regulations that do not empower us to fire them.” Raymond Majongwe, secretary-general of the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe, said that classes in some schools had been severely disrupted as a result of the suspensions.

Under a new public order and security act it is an offence for “any person who, acting in concert with one or more other persons, forcibly invades the rights of other people.” The law is framed so vaguely that it makes all strike activities, such as picketing, an offence.

Innocent Sibanda, the PTUZ national coordinator, condemned the government for disrupting the PTUZ’s meeting in Harare last week. “It was a clear plot to intimidate teachers and to incapacitate us through repressive and draconian laws such as the Public Order and Security Act, from challenging the dismissal of teachers from a common position.”

A high school teacher in Zimbabwe receives a monthly salary of 20,000 Zimbabwe dollars (364 US dollars). The PTUZ has demanded a 100 percent salary increase backdated to January and a 100 percent cost-of-living adjustment backdated to June.



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