

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

29 November 2002

Fiat autoworkers demonstrate against job losses in Italy

On November 26, thousands of striking Fiat workers and their supporters marched through Rome to demonstrate against plans by the auto company to make 8,100 staff redundant (20 percent of its workforce).

More than 20,000 were in attendance at the demonstration and many Fiat workers were involved in the eight-hour period of industrial action held on the same day.

Workers came from all over Italy to take part in the protest, including from the Termini Imerese plant in Sicily and the Arese factory near Milan.

The company announced the cuts as part of a restructuring program as it faces falling sales and increasing debt. On November 25, Fiat said that the Termini Imerese factory may be reopened instead of the 1,800 workers losing their jobs.

There are fears amongst workers that company operations are being streamlined in preparation for a sell-off. In 2000 General Motors bought a 20 percent stake of Fiat Auto and an agreement was made stipulating that it could buy the remaining 80 percent between 2004 and 2009.

Public sector strike in France causes widespread disruption

Strike action and protests by public sector workers across France caused widespread disruption on November 26. Demonstrations by air traffic controllers, postal workers, bus, metro and train drivers, hospital workers and electricity and telephone utility employees were held in major cities across the country in protest at government plans to push through privatisation, public spending cuts and changes to pension agreements. Some 60,000 workers demonstrated in Paris, whilst several thousands protested in Marseilles and Toulouse.

Airlines were most affected by the dispute with Air France, British Airways, Lufthansa, Lot, Scandinavian Airlines, Olympic Airways and others running greatly reduced flights. Severe delays were also caused elsewhere in Europe by the action, as flights were diverted to avoid French airspace.

Meanwhile police were used to break up blockades established by French lorry drivers in their separate dispute over pay. Although some fresh blockades appeared November 26, the protest was greatly diminished after Force Ouvrier, one of the three unions involved in the dispute, pulled out of the strike the day before.

The right-wing French government dismissed the protests, with one MP, Herve Mariton, stating that the “the government

is intent on reform—this is necessary in our country.”

Driving instructors in France continue strike

Driving instructors in France continued their strike action this week, with the number of people now awaiting a driving test examination standing at 150,000. The examiners strike has now entered its seventh week.

The strike is directed against the initial steps towards privatisation of driving test examinations. At the moment, driving lessons at special schools must be paid, but the examinations are free. Another issue in the dispute is a shortage of examination personnel. The inspectors are also demanding the re-evaluation of their wages.

Negotiations between the inspector’s union SNICA-FO and the minister of transport Gilles de Robiens were held this week.

Lead and zinc miners in Macedonia continue hunger strike

Five hundred lead and zinc miners in eastern Macedonia continued the hunger strike they began on November 19, to protest unpaid wages. The miners are employed at the state-owned SASA mine in Makedonska Kamenica; about 60 miles east of Skopje.

The miners are owed three months back pay by the government at an average of about \$300 a month. The government stated that it cannot meet this payment and can only pay the miners one-month’s wage. The mine has been selected for privatisation by the government.

R railway workers in Bulgaria strike to demand payment of wages

Railway workers in Bulgaria held a one-hour strike on November 27 in a dispute over unpaid wages. Nearly 4,000 railway staff participated in the strike, which resulted in 79 trains across the country being halted. The workers are owed some 18 million leva (\$US9.2 million) and a full-scale stoppage has been threatened during the Christmas holiday period.

Scottish health workers in unofficial strike

Health workers in Glasgow, Scotland have been on unofficial strike over pay at five of the city’s hospitals. The wildcat action involved more than 300 administrators and clerical staff at Glasgow Royal Infirmary, the Royal Maternity Hospital, Stobhill, Canniesburn and the Dental Hospital.

In a bid to end the dispute, NHS employers have presented a Scottish concordat that ties wage increases in with wide-sweeping changes to pay structures and working conditions.

The public sector union UNISON is meeting to discuss the proposal.

UK government scientists to strike

UK government scientists employed at the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) laboratories in Suffolk, Essex and Dorset are to stage a 24-hour strike on December 5.

Their action is in protest at pay rates that have fallen by 10 percent over the last year in comparison with staff at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Auto workers at Jaguar, England to ballot on strike action

White-collar workers employed by Jaguar are to be balloted for strike action in a pay dispute. Workers at the company's plants in Liverpool, Coventry and Birmingham are to vote on a proposed two-year pay deal worth 4 percent this year and 3 percent next year.

The Amicus trade union that represents the white-collar staff, mainly engineers and designers, say that the pay deal is unacceptable because of the numerous strings attached, including a proposal that people will not be paid for their first hour of overtime.

Strike action by telecom workers in Sierra Leone

Telecommunication workers at Sierratel, in Sierra Leone, are out on strike over issues such as their pension fund, loan scheme, placement of staff, and a salary increment.

A key issue for the strikers appears to have been bound up with changes made by management to the funding of the company pension scheme. Since the government set up the National Social Security Insurance Trust (NASSIT), management have diverted two thirds of their normal pension contributions into the national fund and only one third is now being paid into the company pension scheme. Workers are concerned that their pensions will be adversely affected.

Local government workers on strike in South African district

Six thousand local government workers, members of the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) are on strike in the Bojanala district of the North-West province. They are protesting that the employers withdrew their transport allowance without warning, repudiated loans to which employees should be entitled, and suspended employees who took part in a legal strike.

On November 21 the workers marched to the offices of the Bojanala District municipality and handed in a list of demands to the executive mayor.

Zambian local government workers to strike over arrears

Zambian local government workers are taking nationwide strike action to press for their salary arrears. They are also protesting the employers' refusal to pay benefits to workers seconded to the water utility companies.

Zambia United Local Authorities Workers Union (ZULAWU) president Glandson Chunga said that Copperbelt

Province ZULAWU officials met on November 21 in Ndola and decided on "a countrywide strike, including the water sector in order to press government to address the issue of paying salaries and 50 percent increment arrears."

Chunga demanded that the government approve the action plan for financing local authorities currently being considered by the Cabinet.

Mufulira Municipal Council workers blocked roads leading to cemeteries to prevent mourners from burying the dead. They also brought the civic centre to a halt, pledging not to resume work until their demands were met. The workers demanded to be paid three months' salary arrears.

Meanwhile workers at Zambia Printing Company have begun strike action. ZPC chapel president Daniel Kaluba said the strike was due to failure by management to pay workers three months salary arrears.

Nigerian airport workers strike to demand release of colleague

Air traffic controllers all over Nigeria called a strike last week to demand the release from detention of the controller of Benin Airport, Alhaji Kareem.

Security men of Titi Abubakar, wife of vice-president Atiku Abubakar, had earlier ordered Kareem's arrest for his reluctance to open the airport after its official closing time so that Abubakar and her staff could return to Abuja. Benin Airport is open between 6.00 am and 6.00 pm because it relies on visual aids for landing and takeoff. Abubakar ordered Kareem to open the airport regardless. Her staff then manhandled Kareem and forced him to open the gates. Abubakar then phoned the commissioner of police in Edo State and ordered him to arrest Kareem.



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