

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

17 January 2003

Lufthansa employees strike in Germany

On January 16, the German airline Lufthansa was forced to cancel 28 domestic and two international flights due to a strike by cabin attendants and ground staff over pay. The stoppage lasted for three-hours with Frankfurt airport, the busiest in Europe, and Berlin being the most affected.

The Verdi trade union called the strike following the failure of airport management to make a new pay offer on January 14. Verdi represents 52,000 Lufthansa employees. The union is calling for a nine percent pay increase and a profit sharing deal. Lufthansa has rejected the pay demand and has offered 3.9 percent in two stages, while it has accepted the concept of profit sharing.

Lufthansa is one of the most profitable airlines in Europe but has seen its shares fall by 29 percent since last November. Lufthansa Chief Executive Juergen Weber has said the company could no longer make a profit forecast for 2003 because of "uncertain conditions".

Firefighters at French airports in pay dispute

Firefighters at Roissy and Orly airports in France began strike action on January 8, following an appeal from the CGT, CFTC and CFE-CGC trade unions. The action had the overwhelming support of nearly all staff and some runways were closed for several hours.

The strike is over the number of firefighters needed to secure a minimum service, including during industrial action. Firefighters claim that airport management is compromising passenger safety because there is not enough staff on runways.

Agricultural college staff strike in Scotland

Staff at agricultural colleges across Scotland took strike action on January 9 over a pay dispute. Some 600 workers at the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) took part in a three-hour stoppage at campuses in Aberdeen, Ayr and Edinburgh.

The stoppage was organised by the Prospect trade

union following a breakdown in talks between the two bodies mediated by Acas conciliation service in December. Prospect members at SAC recently voted for industrial action by a margin of nearly 63 percent on a 75 percent turnout.

The strike affected education, advisory and veterinary services provided by the college. The SAC has its three main campuses, 23 advisory offices, and eight livestock disease surveillance centres throughout Scotland.

Prospect stated that it rejected a deal from management because it was effectively a zero pay increase. Union negotiator Alan Denney said: "Our members at SAC are professional people who do not wish to take action lightly but the ballot result is a reflection of the strength of ill-feeling among members. A zero pay increase for this year amounts to asking members to agree to a pay cut in real terms."

It is the first time in almost 30 years that agricultural college staff have taken industrial action. Prospect said that further stoppages are planned before the end of the month if there is no resolution to the dispute.

Council workers strike in Zimbabwe

Municipal workers at Gweru City Council, Zimbabwe, have been on strike for over a week to demand a 110 percent pay rise. Rubbish has piled up in the streets and a skeleton staff is manning fire, ambulance, clinics and water emergency services. The council claims it can only afford a 70 percent rise, well below the rate of inflation, due to its already large bank overdraft.

Strike continues in Plateau State, Nigeria

Civil servants in Plateau State are continuing industrial action they began on December 2 over the non-payment of salaries and other entitlements. In an interview with *This Day* newspaper the Plateau State Governor, Chief Joshua Dariye, blamed a shortfall in federal funding for the unpaid wages, as well as declining internal revenue. "We are servicing all these debts. Let me say that if they can suspend source

deductions [federal deductions to repay debt] we will be able to pay salaries even two months up front,” he said. Dariye said that only November and December salaries were owing and it “could have been worse as in other states where several months are owed.”

Nigerian university lecturers in nationwide dispute

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) took strike action at the beginning of this year over the federal government’s refusal to honour an agreement it made with the union in June 2001.

In a pamphlet entitled “Government is to Blame for the Coming Crisis”, the union points out that the agreement promised a government allocation of not less than 26 percent of the annual budget, a separate salary structure for academics, and no victimisation of lecturers who took part in the 2001 ASUU strike. It explains that “instead of moving the funding of education towards 26 percent, the 2003 budget further reduced allocation to education from 5.9 percent in 2002 to 1.8 percent, an all time low”.

The government had unilaterally cut basic academic salary and 44 members and five officials of the ASUU at the University of Ilorin were sacked over alleged involvement in the 2001 strike. As a consequence of the government’s deliberate repudiation of the agreement, the union said it had been “pushed to the wall”.

Negotiations between ASUU and the federal government are continuing. ASUU National President Dipo Fasina told the press that there would be no deal with the government until the 49 dismissed University of Ilorin lecturers were reinstated.



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