

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

31 January 2003

## **French schoolteachers hold nationwide day of action**

On January 28, French schoolteachers held a nationwide strike as part of a campaign to oppose plans to shed thousands of jobs in education. Called by the five main education unions, teachers are protesting at plans revealed in the 2003 budget that will lead to the redundancy of 5,600 school aides. A further 20,000 special contracts for youths who help in schools will not be renewed either.

Teachers held strike action and demonstrated in more than 50 towns and cities across the nation including Paris, Marseille, Bordeaux, Toulouse, and Rennes. Organisers said some 60 percent of schoolteachers and 50 percent of college educators participated in the action.

In the capital Paris, 6,000 to 8,000 teachers demonstrated outside the Education Ministry. Among the chants they shouted were "Lay off, Raffarin!" referring to Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin. Between 3,000 and 7,000 teachers and education aides marched and protested in Marseille behind a banner reading "Priority for education".

## **Railway workers in Slovakia strike to oppose cuts in routes**

Railway workers in Slovakia held a six-hour nationwide strike on January 29 in protest at government plans to cut 25 local rail routes. The action resulted in the halting of all passenger and freight rail traffic nationwide between 03.00 to 09.00. The strike also delayed trains bound for destinations on the European mainland.

The stoppage was the first to be held nationwide since the separation of Slovakia from Czechoslovakia in 1993. Leader of the rail workers union, Jozef Schmidt, said that a further indefinite strike was scheduled to be held on January 31 from 23.00. He added that the union would like to have negotiations with the government.

The cuts in railway routes by the government of Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda are part of a general cut in public spending as it seeks to bring levels closer to the requirements of the European Union. Slovakia is planning to join the EU next year.

## **London university lecturers to strike in ongoing cost**

## **of living dispute**

Lecturers at London universities are to take strike action next week in pursuit of extra cost-of-living expenses. The employees, members of the Natfhe, AUT, Unison and Amicus trade unions will participate in a one-day strike on February 4. The unions are demanding a £4,000 weighting allowance for all members based in the capital.

The strike will affect the operation of all universities and higher education institutes in the city. The strike action will also involve lecturers protesting outside the office of the Department for Education and Skills.

Lecturers in London are paid one of the lowest London weightings among all public servants. London weighting is an extra payment that workers receive to compensate for the higher cost of living in the capital. Lecturers at the University of London receive £2,134 per annum, and those at the newer universities between £603 and £2,355. In comparison a policeman in London receives a weighting of £6,000. Those employed in the prison service receive £3,500.

Last November 4 lecturers' unions held a similar strike over London weighting that resulted in the close of a number of campuses.

## **Irish building workers to demonstrate against lack of safety on building sites**

Building workers in Ireland are to hold a national demonstration next week to protest against the lack of safety on construction sites. Supported by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, some 8,000 workers are expected to participate in the Dublin march, comprising members from seven trade unions.

Safety has become a major concern for workers in the industry with 22 people killed on building-site accidents last year alone. A spokesman from the ICTA said, "The idea that so many people could be killed in any occupation in one year while making a living is totally unacceptable in this day and age."

## **Demonstration held in Noyelles-Godault, France against plant closure**

On January 27, a march and demonstration was held in

the town of Noyelles-Godault by employees of the Metaleurop factory to oppose its closure. The protest was attended by 2,000 from a population of 5,700 who live in the town in the Pas-de-Calais region of France. The factory produced metals, lead and zinc. Its closure was announced on January 17 and three days later employees temporarily occupied the plant.

Those attending the demonstration all carried a button stating “I support the employees of Metaleurop.” At the head of the march three local representatives carried a banner with the inscription “All people of Noyelles are at the side of the employees of Metaleurop.”

Later that day the management informed the unions that the payment of wages to workers had been finalised. The majority of Saint-Amand-les-Eaux has demanded a parliamentary inquiry of the Metaleurop S.A. group and the reasons behind why it is closing the plant that has been in the town since 1894.

### **Police fire tear-gas at striking Zimbabwean miners**

Miners at Gaths Mine in Mashava, Zimbabwe, faced police firing tear-gas when they went out on strike on January 24. The strike involved workers at Shabanie and Mashava, who walked out in support of a pay demand of 150 percent to lessen the erosion of their living standards by high inflation.

The strikers gathered at the entrance to Gaths mine and blocked all roads leading to it. In response police fired tear-gas to disperse the workers, and running battles ensued.

Production at the mines has been brought to a halt since all miners and support staff have joined the dispute. Workers involved in essential services were the only ones still working. The mines, owned by African Associated Mines of Zimbabwe (Private) Limited, are Zimbabwe’s two major asbestos producing mines, with over 5 000 permanent workers.

The mine’s general manager, Gale Sibanda said the miners had refused to accept a 60 percent offer made by the company. He said he was waiting for the outcome of negotiations between the Chamber of Mines and the Associated Mine Workers Union of Zimbabwe.

A member of the workers’ committee said: “We want a 150 percent salary increment and we are not going back to work until our demands are met.”

### **Nigerian local government strike set to continue**

The strike by local government workers in Plateau State, Nigeria, is set to continue, as the government has reneged on a promise to pay two months salary arrears. Once the strike began, the workers declared that they

would not to return to work until the state government pays all their salary arrears.

A week ago, Governor Joshua Dariye of Plateau State announced that the state government had raised sufficient funds to pay two months salaries and appealed to the workers to return to work. However, on January 28, state Commissioner for Finance, Emmanuel Ayaba, said that efforts to raise funds to pay the salaries had proved futile. He said he had reviewed the financial situation, and it would only be able to pay one month’s basic salary (excluding allowances).

Chief Michael Bot-Mang, Plateau State deputy governor, said the banks would not approve credit facilities to the state government because of the hard stance of the Central Bank of Nigeria. He said the source of the problem was the huge deductions from federation allocation and appealed to the Federal Government to decrease its deductions so the state could meet its obligations to its work force.

Officials have appealed to workers to return to work while the state government “explored other avenues” to raise funds.

### **Zimbabwe ZBC workers take strike action**

Workers at the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) downed tools on January 28 in support of their demand for a 150 percent increment.

ZBC Chief Executive Munyaradzi Hwengwere said the strike was completely unexpected. “We have not received any communication from the workers and we do not know who is in charge.... As far as we know, the workers just came in the morning, disembarked from the company buses and decided to sit there.” He added that the company had decided to declare the strike illegal. “We have no notice from the workers and even if you want to strike, you have to first reach a deadlock, but there was no deadlock reached.”

The strike has begun the week before the ZBC is planning to go to the finance markets to raise \$1.7 billion for “recapitalisation” and other purposes. Last year’s restructuring resulted in a 50 percent cut in the workforce.



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