

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

31 May 2003

French workers continue strikes against government pension plans

This week workers throughout France continued demonstrations, protests and strikes to oppose the government's public sector pension reforms that include making employees contribute for longer before they can claim a full pension and raising the retirement age.

On May 27, hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated all over France. In Paris some 50,000 demonstrated, including large delegations of teachers and university workers.

Demonstrations in other towns numbered as follows: Grenoble 20,000, Toulouse 55,000, Toulon 30, 000, Avignon 20,000, Saint Nazaire 15,000, Lille 15,000, Ajaccio 15,000. Throughout the country more than half of all teachers took strike action.

Flights were widely affected with more than 70 percent of civil flights cancelled. The postal service La Poste was struck by some 18 percent of workers while France Telecom saw strike participation at 26 percent.

In the city of Marseille, 230,000 took part in a demonstration that many workers in the private sector also joined. The General Confederation of Labour (CGT) trade union stated that 197 strikes were held in the private sector in the Marseille region at firms such as Arcelor, Asco-métal, LIDL, Provence, Cegelec, Nestlé and Renault.

The previous day the Force Ouvrière trade union called a selective strike of workers in the health sector to be held from May 26 to June 1, whilst a number of unions called a strike at the ANPE (national employment agency) from May 26 to 28 to demand the halting of a project of statutory reform of the management. The FO also called an indefinite strike of workers in the finances sector.

On June 2, unions representing workers at the SNCF rail network have called an indefinite national strike. The following day, a national transport strike is

planned.

Refuse workers and emergency doctors' strike in France

Several hundred refuse workers demonstrated on May 27 at Beaubourg, France in an ongoing dispute over pension reform, wages classification, schedules and job security. It was the second day of strike by public sector garbage workers in the Paris region. The workers of private refuse collection employers did not participate. During the strike workers condemned management appeals to private sector workers to break the strike.

The CGT and Force Ouvrière trade union called the strike to coincide with the national protests against the government's planned changes to the pensions system.

In a separate dispute emergency doctors in the Ile-de-France region continued their strike for the creation of new jobs that had begun on May 6.

Scottish nursery nurses continue stoppage

The strike by nursery nurse workers in Scotland has entered its second week. A further 48 hours of strike action began on May 28 with council-run facilities in the Lothians and Borders targeted. The 5,000 staff are members of the Unison trade union and the dispute is centred on a demand for increased pay. Striking workers plan to lobby the local government organisation Cosla in Edinburgh on May 29.

Fully qualified nursery nurses are paid about £13,000 a year and are demanding a pay increase of about £4,000 a year. The last time that workers pay was reviewed was 15 years ago. Duties and responsibilities have increased dramatically since then.

The strike began with a large majority in support of industrial action in a strike ballot held after the breakdown of negotiations with management.

Engineering workers hold stoppage in Slovakia

Workers at the Slovakian engineering firm PSS Detva near Banská Bystrica held a 24-hour strike action on May 27 in protest at the drawing-out of tenders and

delays in the sale of the business by its largest creditors. These include the VÚB bank, the National Labour Office and the state insurance company Sociálna zdravotná poisťovňa.

German engineering workers to strike

This week the IG Metall engineering union in Germany announced a series of strikes to begin on June 2.

The union is calling for the introduction of a 35-hour working week in the eastern part of Germany, from its current level of 38 hours. The strikes are to follow a ballot in which 83 percent of 7,000 steelworkers voted in favour of holding industrial action.

Swedish workers set to continue industrial action over pay

On June 2, 47,000 workers in hospitals, childcare, sports facilities are to strike in an ongoing pay dispute that began on April 23. The workers are members of the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union who are calling for a pay increase of 5.5 percent for its 420,000 members. Bus workers in Sweden will continue the protests with an indefinite strike, involving 18, 000 drivers, on June 4.

Zimbabwean electricity workers strike over pay

Technical staff at the state-owned Zimbabwe Electricity Supplies Authority (ZESA) walked out on strike on Monday May 26, to demand higher pay and the removal of the Executive Chairman, Sydney Gata.

The strikers are demanding a 51 percent salary increment and a minimum basic salary of 125,000 Zimbabwe dollars (\$US157) a month, currently only just enough to cover living costs due to Zimbabwe's huge level of inflation.

Some of the strikers held a demonstration at Harare's Workington Power Station, with placards saying "Gata must go." There is a strong feeling that Gata, who is President Robert Mugabe's brother-in-law, is appropriating the money that should be used to fund a wage rise. A representative of the Zimbabwe Electricity Energy Workers' Union told the media that: "The workers are bitter with Gata's personal expenditure which includes four secretaries and eight vehicles for his personal use. He has authorised the purchase of new cars almost every month."

Management are offering an increment of up to 44 percent, a minimum basic wage of \$Z47,696 , and a transport allowance of \$Z22,000. ZESA claim the

workers went on strike without going through the proper procedures or informing the management. On this basis, the Labour Court declared the strike illegal last week.

In addition to several residential and urban areas affected by power cuts, electronic systems at Air Zimbabwe, including computers, have been put out of action. The water supply is also being affected, due to power cuts at water works.

Having started in Harare, the strike has since widened to other parts of the country, with other power workers supporting the demand for higher wages.

Ghanaian tanker drivers' strike

More than 500 tankers that deliver fuel throughout Ghana have been halted due to the drivers taking strike action. The drivers walked out after 13 of them were arrested last weekend. They were held after a military and police operation for allegedly taking part in illegal fuel deals. Queues were reported at gas stations in the capital Accra as deliveries were halted. Drivers were picketing the Tema Oil Refinery demanding the release of their colleagues.



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