

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

18 July 2003

Bus workers in southern England continue strike

On July 15, bus drivers employed by Stagecoach in south and east Devon held their third one-day strike over pay and conditions. The Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT) members are demanding an increase to bring their hourly pay to £6.50 and to retain their current working conditions. The latest strike affected Stagecoach services in Torbay, Exeter and east Devon with just a quarter of scheduled services being run by the company.

On July 11, Trevor Reynolds, a striking worker on a picket line was taken to hospital after being injured by a bus crossing a picket line in south Devon at Paignton bus station. The driver of the bus was a manager of the company who had been drafted in an attempt to break the strike. The manager was questioned by Torquay police following the incident.

Teachers union calls off strike in Leeds, England

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) cancelled a planned strike by more than 1,000 teachers in Leeds. The strike threat was ended on July 16, one day before the planned action, following talks with Education Leeds which runs schools services in the city. Details have not yet emerged regarding the negotiations.

The 24-hour strike was to be held in opposition to 14 planned compulsory redundancies announced by Education Leeds. In a strike ballot across 200 schools in Leeds, 81 percent of NUT members voted in favour of the action.

Education Leeds has stated that the cuts are necessary because of falling numbers of children in primary schools. The NUT is not opposed to cuts in principle, only disagreeing over how to achieve them. Spokesman Patrick Murphy said, "We don't think there should be any compulsory redundancies—that's the bottom line. We think it is possible [to make the cuts] through retirement and redeployment—no teachers need to be made redundant."

Zambian civil servants strike

Civil servants employed by the Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) took strike action on July 10 in opposition to changes in conditions and the withholding of their salaries.

In Ndola, Zambia Revenue Authority Workers Union (ZRAWU) branch chairman Clement Samboko said that the strikers' grievances were not just over the payment of loans and salary advances. At issue was also the reversal of management's decision to impose a minimum qualification for operational staff of a degree in accounting or economics.

ZRAWU issued a call to end the strike on the following day, after management gave a commitment to clear the backlog of salary payments. The protest had already cost the Government over K10 billion (\$US2.1 million) in uncollected revenue.

A strike by Zambian judiciary support staff demanding payment of housing allowance and arrears going back to April of 2003 coincided with the strike by ZRA employees. The strike prevented the trial of former President Chiluba from taking place. Chiluba, along with the former chief of intelligence, is charged with theft of public funds amounting to K19 billion.

Zambian school workers strike for doubling of pay

Around 250 unionised workers at Chengelo International Secondary School in Mkushi District have launched an indefinite strike to win a 100 percent pay rise and improved conditions of service.

One of the union officials, Renatus Chishimba, said the strikers were mainly drivers, mechanics, carpenters, gardeners, cooks and security guards who have vowed not to return to work until their demands are met.

The strikers denounced the wages being paid, with the lowest paid employee getting about K70,000 (\$US14.65) per week and the highest paid about K150,000 (\$US31.38).

South African petrol pump attendants demonstrate over pay

Hundreds of petrol attendants and autoworkers demonstrated through the streets of Johannesburg on July 16 to demand an increase in pay. The demonstration was called after the negotiations between the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and the employers resulted in deadlock.

Those on the demonstration said they were seeking a 15 percent wage increase and equal pay throughout the country. They rejected the employers' offer of 7.7 percent, saying it would leave them with a poverty wage. NUMSA are threatening to call a strike of all 180,000 workers in the sector, which, as well as petrol station attendants, includes workers in component manufacturing firms, car dealers and panel beaters.

Angola university workers continue strike

Lecturers and workers at the Agostinho Neto University, Luanda, voted to continue their strike action which began June 12. They are demanding an improved salary scale in line with inflation and rejected the government offer made on July 10. As well as a pay rise, they are also demanding improvements in working conditions, including medical assistance and the full payment of salary arrears. University Teachers Trade Union Secretary-General Carlinhos Zassala said that if negotiations were not successful they would call a demonstration through the streets of Luanda in two weeks time that would be supported by the strikers' families as well as students.



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