

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

13 August 2004

## Europe

### South Yorkshire bus strike suspended

On August 10, bus drivers in South Yorkshire, England employed by First suspended their strike that began on July 20 over pay and conditions. It followed an agreement reached on August 9, between the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) and First management.

The TGWU instructed the drivers to return to work even though its members have not yet voted upon the agreement. Drivers were to be balloted on the revised offer on August 12, and the union is recommending acceptance.

Full details of the two-year agreement have not yet been made public but it has been confirmed that drivers will receive a 30 pence an hour pay increase backdated to April of this year, and a further 30 pence an hour from April next year. Only last week, drivers had rejected a revised offer that included such a pay offer, along with the stipulation that it was to be funded by removing the right to sick pay on the first day of absence.

During the course of the action the company had threatened drivers with job losses if the strike continued and said that it was considering employing Polish workers to drive buses. The company lost hundreds of thousands of pounds in revenue, as its services are used by between 100,000 to 150,000 people daily in the South Yorkshire region.

### Civil servants strike continues in Northern Ireland

The ongoing civil servants strike in Northern Ireland entered its 35th week as more workers joined the rolling industrial action. On August 11, staff at the Omagh planning office held strike action, affecting planning applications and the planning appeals system.

The industrial action is the result of a pay dispute and is being organised by the public service trade union Nipsa. The strike followed the government's refusal to give civil service staff any cost of living pay increase since April 2003. Last week Nipsa rejected a government pay offer of 4.65 percent over 16 months.

### Unions in Cyprus threaten to strike over pay freeze

Trade unions in Cyprus have threatened to strike over government plans to implement a pay freeze until 2007 on employees at semi-governmental organisations. The SEK

and PEO trade unions said this week that they would call on their members to take industrial action if their collective agreement is not renewed.

SEK General Secretary Demetris Kittenis said, "I would like to stress that SEK does not want to declare this as a no-win situation. But the fact remains that there has been no progress regarding the matter". He added that he had informed the Finance Minister and the Labour Minister that if the government's position was for a zero percent increase, then workers would be asked to take industrial action.

### UK dock workers to ballot on national strike action

Dock workers employed by Associated British Ports (ABP) are to be balloted on industrial action in a dispute over pay. The ballot is being organised by the Transport and General Workers Union. The dispute affects dockers, drivers and other workers at ABP's 23 ports around Britain, from Ayr to Southampton.

The ballot announcement follows the rejection of a 2.9 percent pay offer by ABP by a margin of three to one. The TGWU is calling for a minimum wage of £7.50 an hour for all dock workers and £10 an hour for drivers as well as a reduction in working hours to 38 hours a week, with no loss of pay, and 23 days' holiday a year, excluding bank holidays.

If action goes ahead it would be the first national dock strike in the UK for 14 years.

## Africa

### Nairobi council workers and nurses strike

Employees of Nairobi City Council downed tools on August 10 and occupied part of City Hall demanding the payment of their June and July salaries amounting to Sh272 million and a further Sh182 million in arrears.

The strikers want the removal of Nairobi Town Clerk Franklin Magaju, whom they hold responsible for the non-payment of their salaries.

According to the *East African Standard* (Nairobi), the striking workers nailed timber across Magaju's door, after he had locked himself in his office. He remained there for almost an hour until police rescued him. The protest brought all operations at City Hall to a standstill. Many strikers demonstrated outside the building carrying placards, which read, "They paid salaries for the bosses only leaving us

hungry. Maguju must go”.

Nurses from Pumwani Maternity Hospital, who had taken independent action the previous day over understaffing at their hospital, supported the campaign demanding back pay.

*The East African Standard* (Nairobi) reported on August 10 that the government-appointed Pumwani Maternity Hospital Task Force had found evidence that some mothers and babies had died in the hospital due to “improper management and negligence”.

The nurses were demanding task force recommendations—that the total staff of 156 nurses be increased to 267—be implemented immediately.

On the same day as the City Hall protest, more than 200 disabled hawkers in wheelchairs gathered outside Jogoo House in Nairobi. They wanted a meeting with Vice President Moody Awori or Local Government Minister Muskari Kombo to protest against their removal from the Central Business district. Traffic was brought to a standstill by the protest until the police arrived.

### **Nigerian hospital staff strike enters its ninth week**

The strike of nursing staff at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), which began 56 days ago on June 16, is continuing. The action is in protest against the non-payment of the 22 percent award, approved by the federal government in 2003. The strikers are owed 19 months salary arrears.

Six unions are involved in the dispute—the Association of Medical Laboratory Dentists, the National Association of Hospital and Administrative Pharmacists, the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives, the National Association of Professional Dentist Staff of Nigeria, Non Academic Staff Union and the Medical and Health workers Union of Nigeria.

On August 7, *Vanguard* (Lagos) reported indications that health unions in other tertiary health institutions across the country may join the strike “if the industrial crisis is not resolved with immediate effect”. Yekini Adeniran, spokesman for the strikers, told a Lagos news conference that because of LUTH management intransigence, “they would employ all avenues to drive home their demands”.

He said: “We have resolved to call on sister unions in other health institutions through our respective national bodies to support and solidarise with us by joining the struggle for functional health care delivery system in the country which will provide efficient and qualitative service to the public. We have also resolved to seek the intervention of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and for the central labour body to specifically organize solidarity actions, picketing and rallies in support of LUTH on this issue of health care which touches everybody.”

Adeniran dismissed claims that nurses disregarded

patients’ lives services. “We want to emphasise that this action is a struggle for saving LUTH from total collapse,” he said. “We are protecting our rights and seeking redress for wrongs. We want the hospital to be adequately equipped and its environment conducive, healthy for workers, fit for patients to stay and receive excellent services as against the current death trap for patients.”

He pointed out that Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) accreditation given to the hospital was withdrawn due to dilapidation of the entire edifice; that LUTH has only one functional X-ray machine in the entire complex; and does not possess any functional scanning machine. He added: “LUTH makes nothing less than 25 million monthly from patients who are made to pay through their nostrils, yet, there is basically nothing to show for it.”

The striker’s demands include immediate payment of the 19-months arrears and the removal of the Chief Medical Director, Professor Onatolu Odukoya.

### **Zimbabwean minister orders newspaper strikers back to work**

Striking workers at Zimbabwe Newspapers have been ordered by the Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare to return to work within 24 hours.

Zimpapers group chief executive Justin Mutasa said that the company will ask the Labour Court for a “disposal order” so it can deal with the workers in terms of the company’s code of conduct.

He claimed that the strike was illegal, confined to the Harare branch and only 105 employees out of a total labour force of 1115 were involved. Those who did not follow company procedures to solve their grievances would face disciplinary action, he said.

### **South African supermarket workers take strike action**

Workers at three Spar supermarkets in Limpopo province, South Africa, have gone on strike to demand a salary increase. The strikers are members of the South African Plantation Workers’ Union, Sapawu.

They also want overtime payments for Sunday working and public holidays. Dikeledi Moseri, a spokesperson for the union, said workers are demanding a 15-percent increase but management is only prepared to pay seven percent. A spokesperson for Spar claimed that the business is continuing because of the employment of temporary workers.



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