

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

17 December 2004

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Europe

Greek union members strike

On December 15, members of the General Confederation of Greek Labour (GSEE) and the civil servants' federation (ADEDY) held an afternoon rally at the Pedion tou Areos Park in central Athens. The demonstrators were protesting unemployment and price rises. A similar rally was held in Thessaloniki.

Bank staff also struck from 12.15 to 2.00 p.m., local time to protest planned changes to social insurance systems. Secondary school teachers demonstrated to demand salary increases and more state funding.

Bus workers strike in the northern Netherlands

On December 9, bus workers throughout the northern region of the Netherlands struck for 24 hours to protest planned job cuts by the Arriva company. Arriva plans to shed jobs following a cut in government subsidies for public transport. The company has warned that 62 employees could be made redundant following the decision to end five bus routes due to the cuts.

The stoppages resulted in most city and regional bus services in the northern part of the Netherlands coming to a halt. The Abvakabo FNV trade union announced that it expected some 500 to 600 drivers employed by Arriva to support the strike. It was reported that by 7.30 a.m., no buses had left their depots in the Groningen province. Bus services in many areas in the provinces of Friesland, Overijssel and Flevoland were also hit during the strike. Further reports during the day said that there was little or no bus service operating in Leeuwarden.

During the day, striking employees hired buses and travelled to a demonstration at trade union headquarters in Groningen.

London Underground workers vote to strike

Tube drivers on two of the London Underground

(LU) routes are set to strike on Christmas Eve and January 5 in a dispute over the demotion of a driver for passing red signal lights. Tube workers employed at the Arnos Grove depot voted by nine to one in favour of industrial action.

The drivers are members of the train drivers' union Aslef. The union has accused LU of unfair treatment of the driver and said that an appeal hearing took place without any union representation. It is expected that the stoppages on the Piccadilly line on Christmas Eve will affect travel to and from Heathrow Airport and Christmas shoppers.

Meanwhile staff at the Acton Town depot on the LU District line will take industrial action on January 4 to protest "appalling facilities" at Earl's Court tube station.

Teaching assistants in south England continue strike action

Teaching assistants in Brighton and Hove in the south of England held a third day of strike action on December 10, following a breakdown in talks between the city council and trade unions. The strike closed many schools.

The assistants are striking in opposition to plans to cut the number of weeks they are paid. The staff are members of the Unison and GMB trade unions. Some 1,050 classroom assistants are employed in Brighton and Hove, with 730 of these GMB or Unison members.

Brighton and Hove City Council plans to give staff pay increases, but then cut the number of weeks they are paid to work, effectively imposing a pay cut. Most of the assistants are paid for 49.5 weeks a year or 52 weeks in special schools. The council intends to cut this to 44.

A further strike is planned for January 6.

Africa

Kenyan local government workers protest pay arrears

Local government workers in Kisumu, Kenya,

demonstrated on December 13 to demand payment of five months' salary arrears totalling Sh78 million (\$US975,000). They shouted slogans, waved placards and blew whistles in a lively protest outside to the town hall. The protestors demanded to see the mayor but were refused.

The council is heavily in debt and has been rocked by financial scandals. The week before the protest the town hall came to a halt when unpaid electricity bills led to the power being disconnected. Local residents have claimed that one cause of the crisis is that bogus rate collectors are taking the money they collect, so it does not get paid to the council.

Namibian mill owners recruit strike breakers

On December 10, 200 strikers at Namib Mills in Namibia, a manufacturer of pasta products, opposed the bussing in of 40 casual workers to break their strike. Their action began three weeks after the annual wage negotiations with the company reached a stalemate. The workers are demanding a pay increase of 10.5 percent and N\$50 (\$US8.90) for housing, while the company has offered a pay increase of only eight percent and a N\$15 (\$US2.67) housing allowance.

Strikers have been camping out in front of their workplace to ensure that no production takes place and have vowed to continue doing so. Namibia Wholesale and Retail Workers Union (NWRWU), Joshua Mabuku told the *Namibian*, "We will stay put until our demand is met, if need be Christmas will find us here."

The casual workers said they had been tricked into undermining the strike, and were now trapped in a "war" between Namib Mills and its employees. Twenty-seven year-old Shatipamba Hawala told the *Namibian* that he had been promised a job in a security company in order to lure him from his hometown. "To the surprise of all of us... we were brought here where we had work in the factory and others loaded trucks [for] almost 24 hours," he explained.

Another casual worker commented, "All that we want is [for] these people to pay us for the days that we worked and take us back home ... it's clear they recruited us under false pretences."

The strikers threatened the company with "serious action" unless their "illegal practice" was stopped immediately. "We are not going to allow this practice to continue, it amounts to a criminal offence," Mabuku said. An article in Namibia's Labour Act says that

employers are not allowed to recruit new employees to do the work of those engaged in a legal strike.

Nigerian doctors strike continues

Resident hospital doctors throughout Nigeria are now in their third week of strike action, with hospitals and health centres remaining shut. The doctors began their action after giving the government a 21-day ultimatum to pay salary arrears and entitlements.

The president of the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD), Dr. Jerry Oguzie, explained that the federal government has persistently slashed its financial allocations to government-owned health institutions since February this year. "Presently only about two teaching hospitals in Nigeria can boast of paying salaries in full; even then, this is at the costly expense of not having funds to run these hospitals," he said.

Most doctors were only being paid for 15 days even when they had worked for a full month. NARD had previously given the government a 30-day ultimatum in September followed by a two day warning strike in November, but "the Federal Government decided to keep mum over the issue." Another reason for the action was the non-payment of an agreed 22 percent salary increase for doctors in some federal and state government-owned hospitals.

Members of the Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria (MHWUN) joined the doctors' strike action last week. These workers, including porters, orderlies, auxiliary nurses, cleaners, messengers and grass cutters, gave the government a 30-day ultimatum that expired last week. They also complained that they had been hit by cuts in financial allocations, leading to 40 percent deductions in salary payments. Some workers had been taking home as little as N1,000 (\$US7.69) a month.



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