

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

13 January 2006

Europe

London Underground workers continue strike action over new rotas

London Underground staff staged a second 24-hour strike on January 9 in an ongoing dispute over new rotas and safety conditions. The stoppage led to the closure of 40 underground stations at the peak of the action. The strike ended at 1830 GMT, with 19 stations still closed and delays on two underground lines.

The staff, who include ticket office employees, are members of the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union. Workers fear that the introduction of the new rotas will lead to many job losses and threaten safety.

Portuguese airport staff strike in job security dispute

Members of the Aviation Workers Union launched a 24-hour strike at midnight on January 6 in a dispute over job security. The conflict centres on claims by the union that the government's National Airport Authority (ANA) is seeking to replace its members with staff from outside firms.

The industrial action led to the cancellation of some flights at smaller airports. More than half of all flights at Oporto, Faro in the Algarve tourism region and in the Azores islands were cancelled due to the strike. Portugal's biggest airport, Lisbon's Portela, and airports on Madeira island were not affected by the stoppage.

Civil servants in Northern Ireland demonstrate to oppose low pay

On January 6, civil servants held a protest in Belfast as part of a campaign to highlight low pay in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Workers who earn the statutory minimum wage demonstrated outside Belfast City Hall.

The demonstration was called by the NIPSA public sector union, which is balloting 20,000 civil servants on whether to hold indefinite industrial action over low pay. The ballot follows the imposition of a pay award by the Secretary of State Peter Hain before Christmas. This had already been rejected by the NIPSA members.

Hain claimed the deal was worth 3.49 percent. The union has stated that it amounts to an increase of just 0.2

percent for the majority of civil servants. The ballot is due to be completed January 30 and NIPSA warned that if strike action occurred, it would lead to "massive disruption to vital public services across Northern Ireland."

The secretary of the union, John Corey, said, "Northern Ireland Civil Service staff have been denied fair increases in rates of pay for the last three years. In fact, measured against inflation their pay rates have been cut by over 7 percent. Offering only a 0.2 percent increase for 2005 was derisory and insulting."

Italian trade unions to ban all industrial action during Winter Games

On January 11, Italian trade unions signed an agreement with the government stipulating that they would not stage any strikes during next month's Winter Olympics in Turin.

The agreement bans strikes from January 31 to March 23. The games run from February 10 to 26, while the Paralympics run from March 10 to 19. The deal had an immediate impact as Alitalia flight attendants had announced a planned a 24-hour strike to coincide with the February 10 opening ceremony. Pilots at the airline had also planned to hold a four-hour stoppage on February 9. Both strikes have now been cancelled.

Africa

Malawian sports club workers strike to force out racist boss

Workers at the Blantyre Sports Club (BSC) in Malawi have gone out on strike to demand that their manager, Bob Dudley, is removed from his post for his racist treatment of the black workers.

One of the strikers told Blantyre Newspapers Limited (BNL), a Malawian newspaper group, "All our benefits have been removed and this month he [Dudley] deducted K1,150 [US\$9.35] from our salaries for reasons best known to himself."

Since Dudley became manager he has made some parts of the club "no-go areas for blacks," used racist insults and fired the local union leader, Snoden Ibu, for opposing

such attacks.

Namibian mineworkers stop work in protest

On January 10 around 450 mineworkers went on strike for part of the day at Roessing open-pit uranium mine in Namibia, part of the Rio Tinto Group, as a protest against the low salary increase being offered to them by management.

A crowd assembled at the gate to the mine in the morning to see the local officials of the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) hand over a petition to management.

The MUN is demanding an increase of 8 percent and a lump sum of N\$1,850 [US \$305], or alternatively an increase of 9 percent across the board. Roessing management has offered an 8 percent increase without a lump sum.

Nigerian teachers on strike

Teachers in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, are refusing to return to work for the second term, unless the state government addresses their grievances.

This list includes the lack of promotion over the last seven to nine years, the lack of payment for leave for the last three years, and non-payment of October's salary—it was stolen while being held at the Ministry of Education. The list also includes complaints about other benefits not being received, as well as the general decay of the state's educational infrastructure.

The Academic Staff Union of Secondary Schools (ASUSS), Nasarawa State chapter, said that its attempts to raise these issues last year had not met with a response from the state government.

Staff on strike at French embassy in Zambia

Twenty local staff members at the French embassy in Lusaka, Zambia, have held a three-day strike to demand a pay increase. Their present monthly salaries are the lowest of all the consulates, at around US\$360.

The workers want their salaries increased to be at the same level as those at the other embassies, who earn around US\$600.



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