

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

27 October 2006

Europe

Greek schoolteachers continue strike action

Greek primary school teachers continued their six-week strike after talks between the Greek prime minister and leaders of the teachers' unions failed to reach a settlement. The teachers are striking to demand pay increases and more funding for the national education budget.

They are calling for an increase in their basic monthly wage to €1,400 (US\$2,700) from €950.

On October 26, 4,000 teachers, students and civil servants protested in central Athens to demand that the government implement their demands. Referring to the government's 2007 draft budget, many chanted, "It will not pass."

The strike has had a widespread impact throughout the country and has won support from other groups of workers. Greece's secondary schoolteachers have been supporting their primary colleagues with a solidarity strike. As a result, many children have not attended school since the academic year started in mid-September.

Train controllers in Brussels strike

On October 26, train controllers began industrial action in Brussels, Belgium, to protest a lack of resources and staff. The strike began at 4:00 a.m. in the Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve station and caused disruptions on the Namur-Brussels-Charleroi line. Prior to the strike, rail unions had been in discussions with the Belgian railway company NMBS/SNCB.

There are currently 34 controllers employed at the station, and staff say that at least 40 are needed. A representative of the CGSP trade union said that due to the lack of staff, "They are unable to choose their days-off or holidays."

Finnair cabin crew strike over plan to recruit cheap labour

Cabin crews at the Finnish airline Finnair struck for two days beginning October 18. The action by 1,500 cabin crew staff resulted in the grounding of most of its international flights last week, with thousands of passengers having to find alternative transport.

The stoppage began following the flight attendants' union's protest at the airline's plans to recruit personnel through its Estonian subsidiary, Aero, at lower rates than for Finnair cabin staff. The company said competition in the

airline industry had forced it to consider hiring 500 more flight attendants through Aero, in order to meet growing demand on Asian routes.

Following the strike, the company announced that the action will directly affect the airline's annual results by €7 million (US\$8.8 million), and will cost more than €3 million (US\$3.7 million) in lost ticket reservations. Last year, the firm reported an operating profit of €82 million.

Finnair and the trade unions agreed to continue negotiations on employment contracts and the company's hiring policy. Finnair flies to 50 destinations and has a fleet of 60 aircraft.

Envelope factory staff in Aberdeen, Scotland, protest changed shift patterns

Staff at Diamond Envelopes in Aberdeen staged industrial action on October 23 in response to company plans to impose substantial shift changes. The 90 Amicus trade union members include machine operators, setters and warehouse staff.

The company plans to change working patterns, which would see the loss of the "twilight" shift, worked mainly by women with children of school age who are able to work around their childcare arrangements. Were this to happen, many of the staff would find it difficult to continue working at the plant.

Bus drivers in Newcastle and South Shields, England, reject pay deal

On October 23, 700 members of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), employed by the Stagecoach bus company in Newcastle and South Shields took 24 hours' industrial action. During the stoppage, Stagecoach operated a skeleton service.

Last week, the drivers rejected a pay offer from the company amounting to 12 percent over 28 months. The union's negotiating team had recommended accepting the offer. It was rejected by the drivers because it would be nearly two-and-a-half years before the full 12 percent materialised.

This week, the TGWU postponed a further strike planned for October 26. Talks are due to take place on October 30.

Teachers at Merseyside, England, strike over unpaid extra workload

Teachers at a primary school in St. Helens, Merseyside staged a 24-hour strike on October 19 to protest new national funding rules for teachers with extra workloads. The staff, members of the NASUWT trade union, are employed at Holy Spirit Primary School and are expected to take on additional duties under the new contracts.

The union said that more strikes would be held unless the dispute with St. Helens Council was resolved.

A member of the NASUWT told the BBC, “Teachers who are paid responsibility allowances are having them taken away, but told to continue doing these duties without pay. Staff are then being invited to apply to take on extra duties in addition to their current responsibilities, but only two members of staff will receive payment for them”

Africa

Kenyan university strike goes ahead

The proposed strike by university lecturers in Kenya has gone ahead. Beginning October 23, 3,500 lecturers took strike action seeking a six- to sevenfold pay rise, for a fund to be created to finance research and more involvement in university administration. Currently, university lecturers’ minimum monthly salary is 38,000 Kenyan shillings (\$US530).

The strike has affected all six Kenyan public universities, including the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University.

At Moi University in Eldoret, 2,000 students demonstrated in support of their lecturers. The lecturers are members of the University Academic Staff Union (UASU), and the action was officially launched at Kenyatta, where the UASU leadership led a march.

As the strike began on Monday, the Industrial Court issued a ruling that the lecturers should return to work immediately. Justice Charles Chemmutut of the Industrial Court declared the lecturers could not be on strike and be seeking to negotiate their pay claim at the same time. The vice chancellors of the universities involved have met and announced their opposition to the action.

USAU has called for the disqualification of the Justice Charles Chemmutut from presiding over their pay dispute. USAU National Chairman Dr. Sammy Kubasu described the strike as “overwhelmingly successful” but said that he was willing to meet with the government.

Liberia: Workers at UNHCR camp take action over non-payment of wages

Workers employed by the Foundation for the African Development Aid (ADA), which supplies services at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) camp for returnees in Monrovia, have taken strike action over non-payment of wages. One of the pickets explained as reported in the *Analyst* newspaper: “This is the legitimate and appropriate method...we employed diplomacy but to no

avail.”

The ADA is in dispute with the UNHCR, and claim that they in turn are owed money by the UNHCR. The ADA had been employed by the UNHCR to teach crop production to returnees at the camp. The UNHCR has now terminated the contract with ADA, citing poor management. Currently the camp is being run by the UNHCR but is likely to be handed over to the Norwegian Refugees Council, an international NGO, in the near future.

Namibia: hotel workers’ strike action

Around 250 hotel workers were due to begin strike action October 24 in pursuit of a wage demand. They are employed at the prestigious Windhoek Country Club and Resort.

The workers belonging to the Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU) are seeking a monthly pay increase of N\$300 (US\$39) per month and N\$300 housing allowance. The union has been in negotiations for eight months. The latest offer from hotel management is for a wage increase of N\$100 (US\$13) and a housing allowance of N\$50 (US\$7).

NAFAU General Secretary Kiros Sackarias, who used to be an employee at the hotel, explained, “The company was given more than one chance to reconsider its rigid position to accommodate the workers’ demands.”

Hotel management has enjoyed two salary increases in the course of this year. The Namibian government has part ownership of the hotel.

Namibia: Uranium mine workers take wildcat action

Around 100 operators at the Roessing Uranium open cast mine downed tools on Monday, demanding a regrading and higher pay. They were joined by other workers coming on later shifts.

The mine’s corporate services general manager, Rehabeam Hoveka, claimed the operators had recently been job-evaluated and condemned the action as illegal. Mine management and officials of the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) are currently in negotiations.

The mine produces about 7 percent of the world’s uranium needs. It currently produces 3,800 tonnes a year, but management is seeking to drive up production to at least 4,000 tonnes a year.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact