

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

31 August 2000

## **French fishermen protest the high price of fuel**

French fishermen are protesting against the high price of fuel. The action, which began on August 30, has seen fishermen in their boats blockade most of the ports along France's Channel, Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts.

Ports disrupted include Calais, Boulogne and Cherbourg. Freight and ferry services to Britain have been heavily disrupted, as well as commercial and passenger traffic to Corsica and Africa due to the closure of Marseille and other Mediterranean ports.

In one area in Brittany, angry fishermen dumped tons of fish and rubbish outside the office of the local prefect.

Agriculture and Fisheries Minister Jean Glavany is to meet with union representatives on August 31. In Paris, taxi drivers have said that they are considering striking in support of the fishermen's campaign.

## **Catalan farmers protest against fuel prices**

On August 19, 6,000 farmers blocked main roads in Catalonia, Spain with 2,000 tractors, in protest against this year's 46 percent increase in fuel prices. The demonstrations are the first of a planned campaign by farmers' organisations for the coming autumn to demand the government cut taxes on agricultural fuels. The farmers blocked roads in all four Catalan provinces, Barcelona, Lerida, Girona and Tarragona and distributed leaflets to car drivers with their demands.

## **Spanish Air Europa pilots prepare to strike**

On August 28 pilots employed by Spanish airline Air Europa announced that they were to strike for two weeks from September 14. The pilots, members of the Spanish Airlines Pilots Union, are in dispute over the terms of a new contract. The strike is expected to suspend many international and national flights. Air Europa has the second biggest fleet of aircraft after the state airline Iberia. It flies to destinations in Europe and the Americas and accounts for about 80 percent of

flights on the busy Madrid-Barcelona service.

## **Olive farmers in Southern Spain protest falling prices of olive oil**

On August 22, olive farmers in Andalucia protested for the fourth time against falling prices of olive oil, their main product. With 54 tractors and about 20 vans, they blocked the main road connecting the capital Madrid with Cadiz, near the village of Bailén in the province of Jaen.

They demanded that the government take urgent measures against the fall of the price of olive oil by implementing import controls and subsidies. The provincial secretary of the farmers union UPA (Union de Pequeños Agricultores - Small Farmers Union) Rodriguez demanded that Agriculture Minister Miguel Arias Canete halt upcoming negotiations with Tunisia and Morocco to create a free market for the trade of olive oil.

## **Scottish council workers protest to demand pay increase**

Council workers in Scotland carried out their planned 24-hour stoppage on August 29. An estimated 70,000 workers were involved. The workers are members of the public sector union Unison that has 80,000 members in Scotland. The industrial action follows the rejection by local government workers of a 2.5 percent pay rise.

Local services affected included schools, refuse collection and council offices. The strike also involved cleaners at the Scottish Parliament, who are contracted by Edinburgh Council.

Further two-day and three-day strikes are planned by Unison, but no dates have been set. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities Vice President Pat Watters said that the 2.5 percent pay offer would not be increased as government spending limits had imposed it.

## **Unofficial train drivers strike ends in Ireland**

Irish train drivers on unofficial strike for the past 10

weeks returned to work on August 29. The strike against the CIE Irish Rail Company involved more than 100 drivers and was organised by the Irish Locomotive Drivers Association in Dublin. The ILDA is not a recognised union. Police arrested a number of ILDA members earlier this week after they had barricaded themselves in the rail company's boardroom.

The main issue behind the strike was the reorganisation of the company and fears among the drivers that the Irish rail system had a number of safety faults. On August 25, the ILDA met to discuss the dispute and then informed the Irish Labour Court and Labour Relations Commission that it was calling the strike off. The strike affected many rail routes in the west of Ireland in what is the busiest period of the year.

### **Nigerian minimum wage strikes continue**

Hundreds of Nigerian civil servants have gone on indefinite strike in the state of Plateau in the central region of the country against government attempt to impose a minimum wage on public sector workers. The state government had decided to peg the minimum wage at N5, 500 instead of the N5, 850 earlier agreed on. The government claimed that union representatives had agreed that the figure of N5, 850 would be reviewed if the total wage bill exceeded N306 million monthly. A joint union and management committee calculated the total would come to N370 million, so the state government cut the minimum wage.

A statement from the Plateau governor's office said that workers would be made redundant if the strike continued. Essential services including water supply, health care and media have been severely disrupted.

### **Niger truck drivers step up dispute**

Lorry drivers in Niger have been on strike for two weeks over a pay claim. Talks between leaders of the strike and lorry owners broke down and the strikers are now threatening to blockade roads. Most markets in Niger, which are supplied by the transport companies, are empty. The government is threatening to intervene if the drivers carry out their blockade threat.

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