

# Workers Struggles: Europe, the Middle East and Africa

23 August 2001

## **Irish rail drivers to resume strike action**

On August 20 the Irish Locomotive Drivers' Association (ILDA) announced that it would shortly resume strike action against Iarnród Éireann, the Irish rail company. The strike is part of a long running dispute over union recognition. Appeals to the Labour Court by a number of drivers against disciplinary action by the company relating to an earlier strike last May were rejected this week.

The Iarnród Éireann has stated that the industrial action taken by the ILDA drivers last May was unofficial and that it would seek damages from the ATGWU, and its British-based parent body, the Transport and General Workers' Union, if a fresh strike were to proceed disrupting services.

The ILDA countered that a notice of industrial action would be made to the travelling public, but a formal strike notice was not required as drivers would merely be resuming the strike suspended last May.

## **Ground staff at Newcastle Airport vote to strike**

Ground staff employed by Groundstar at Newcastle International Airport, England, have voted to strike in a dispute over pay. The 148 workers are member of the Transport and General Workers Union and voted by a margin of more than 90 percent to strike. The union has set the first strike date on September 1, to protest at the low pay they earn in relation to that of staff working for another company at the airport. On August 22, Groundstar management and union officials were set to meet at Acas, the arbitration service, in an attempt to resolve the dispute.

## **Strike by UK civil servants dealing with foot and mouth epidemic**

On August civil servants employed at the government department dealing with foot and mouth disease held a one-day strike in a dispute over low pay. Some 3,000 workers held the action six months to the day from the

beginning of the foot and mouth crisis. The staff are employees of Defra (Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs). Defra was formed through merging responsibilities formerly undertaken by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Maff).

During the action, workers picketed offices throughout England and Defra headquarters in Smith Square, Central London.

The staff are members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union. Ex-DETR civil servants earn up to £4,400 per year more than former Maff colleagues. Union negotiator Sheila Pickman said, "PCS members [in Maff] have endured years of low pay in comparison with other government departments, and Maff's failure to address that has led to the very stark contrasts now with Defra."

## **Egyptian workers protest withheld wages**

Around 1,200 Egyptian labourers went on strike earlier this month due to the late-payment of wages. Most of the 1,400 employees of the Qaha Food Industries, a recently privatised factory, in Qalyubiya in the Nile Delta are protesting not having been paid for work carried out in July. Workers at another factory in Qalyubiya, Al-Sherif plastics factory, started a hunger strike protesting non-payment of salaries for five months.

## **South African clothing workers strike**

Six thousand clothing workers in the Gauteng region of South Africa went on strike on August 21 in support of a wage demand of 7.5 percent. A ballot conducted by the South African Clothing and Textile Union (Sactwu) returned a 93 percent vote in favour of strike action.

The management's final offer was 1.7 percent together with a one year wage freeze. The union has

done everything in its power to impose the demands of management on its members. An official of Sactwu, Van der Rheede, said that the union had taken a decision to moderate its wage demands this year as it was mindful of the situation in the clothing industry. “We are disappointed that the employers have not accepted our position given that our proposals sought to assist the industry. Employers are seeking to extract further concessions from the union, even though it has made moderate demands.”

The union averted a strike by 33,000 clothing workers in the Western Cape area, when they reached a last minute settlement with the Cape Clothing Association. The settlement includes a payment of R430,000 into an Industry Protection Fund to “help combat illegal imports”.

### **Car workers continue strike in South Africa**

The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) is attempting to broker a settlement of the strike of 21,000 South African auto-workers that began on August 6. The original wage demand of 15 percent, which was reduced to 12 percent by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), has now been cut by a further two percent by the union.

The CCMA has recommended an increase of 8.5 percent from July this year plus a further 0.5 percent from January next year, with an “improvement factor” of 0.75 percent for years two and three of the contract period. It also recommends that the clause that there would be no further claims should be referred to a “joint industry group”. NUMSA said it hoped the strikers would approach the proposals in a positive spirit. The Congress of South African Trade Unions has put out a press release in an attempt to obtain a vote to call off the strike. It appealed to workers to attend factory meetings this week and stressed its own pro-management outlook with the statement, “We have always been optimistic that the strike action can only be resolved through constructive dialogue. We want to move away from narrow and simplistic wage issues and look at the broader transformative issues of the industry.”

### **Worker’s murder in Namibia sparks “go-slow”**

Workers at TransNamib’s OPX Division went on a go-slow last week to protest against their inadequate transport allowance of N\$120 a month. One of their

colleagues, Moses Ndakohambo, was murdered last Tuesday night when he was forced to walk home because he didn’t have money for a taxi.

The OPX workers leave work later than other workers, because they have to load trains going to countrywide destinations. When the monthly transport allowance has been taxed the workers are left with between N\$60 and N\$70 a month, but the taxis cost about N\$200 a month.

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