

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

20 September 2001

London Tube workers to vote on strike action

Thousands of London Underground (LU) workers are to be balloted on whether to stage a series of strikes over pay. A Yes vote would severely disrupt the tube service for much of next month.

The strike call came after union bosses rejected an improved four percent pay offer last week. The offer was raised from 3.7 percent on the recommendation of an independent mediator, but union leaders say it still falls short of their expectations.

Technical staff at Royal Shakespeare Company threaten future action

Production workers at the home of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) have called off a strike after an eight-hour meeting. The dispute involving technical staff at the RSC in Stratford-upon-Avon would have forced the cancellation of weekend performances of *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*. But the workers' union, Bectu, warned it would carry out planned strikes on Thursdays and Saturdays if a revised redundancy package is considered unacceptable.

Marconi UK could face industrial action over job cuts

Marconi's plans to cut 2,100 jobs from its UK workforce could result in strike action, unions have warned. The four main unions representing workers at the troubled telecommunications equipment group have said the losses must be achieved through voluntary redundancy. Officials from the MSF union said there was growing pressure for strike action amongst its members.

The unions have also complained that Lord Simpson, Marconi's former chief executive, is in line to receive a £1million pay-out following his resignation earlier this month.

UK tanker drivers in pay dispute

P&O chemical tanker drivers in set to launch the first of two 24-hour strikes in a dispute over pay. The delivery drivers are protesting at new contracts, which

they insist will result in wage cuts and force drivers to spend more time behind the wheel.

The 70 drivers, who are based at Ellesmere Port, Immingham, Thurrock and Middlesbrough, are due to strike on September 24.

Israeli civil servants plan dispute

Workers in several government offices including the Income Tax, National Insurance, VAT and Excise offices, have all announced their intention to strike due to the Finance Ministry's refusal to increase their special wage bonuses. Two weeks advance notice of industrial action is a legal precondition in Israel.

Chairman of the income tax workers union, Talhum Fardilov, pointed out that staff at the Defense Ministry have received a bonus of 85 percent, and those in the Knesset a 74 percent bonus. Government workers are demanding their proposed 30 percent.

In response, the wages director of the Finance Ministry, Yuval Rachlevsky, said the decision by the arbitration body to grant a special pay supplement to tax workers took place years ago when there were staff shortages. Rachlevsky concluded bluntly, "Today there is no such shortage and there is therefore no justification for this bonus to these workers, let alone for increasing it."

Kenyan refuse collectors strike

Over 4,000 refuse collectors employed by the Mombassa Municipal Council have been on strike since September 12, demanding the immediate payment of three months' salary arrears. The council claims that it doesn't have the money to pay them.

Last week the strikers marched to the Town Hall, chasing away senior officials and trapping deputy town treasurer D S Mwandawiro in his office. Mwandawiro rang *The Nation* on his cell phone and told them the council had released enough cash to pay part of the June salaries, but the strikers rejected the offer, demanding to payment of the arrears in full.

They workers pointed out they couldn't pay rent and

school fees or feed their families.

They expressed their anger and frustration by emptying garbage on to the major municipal roads. Traders threatened to boycott the main markets, which were overflowing with waste. At two of the markets, Mackinnon and Kongowea, traders have been virtually locked out by the mountains of trash. Several youth, suspected of spreading litter on the roads, have been arrested.

On Monday the strikers marched through the town carrying a miniature coffin of the Mayor, which they dumped outside the Town Hall, along with a dead goat. On the same day top council officials travelled to Nairobi in an attempt to negotiate with Minister of Local Government Joseph Komotho for a financial bail out. Komotho demanded that the strikers return to work immediately, but at a mass meeting outside the Town Hall the next day the strikers rejected the minister's return-to-work call and repeated their demand for "payment first".

Coast Provincial Medical Officer Dr. S. K. Sheriff has warned that the town is courting a health disaster, with heaps of rubbish piled up on the streets. Sixteen council clinics were closed on Monday after nurses joined the salary strike. On the same day fire-fighters also joined the strike.

Anjouan Doctors strike over "deplorable conditions"

Public hospital doctors on the island of Anjouan—part of the Comoros Islands in the Mozambique Channel between Mozambique and Madagascar—began a four day strike on September 13, against "deplorable conditions" of life and work.

A spokesman for the strikers, Dr Ahmed Abdallah, warned that if the doctors' demands were not met by Sunday an open-ended strike would begin on September 19.

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