Workers Struggles: Europe

3 June 1999

French Eurotunnel workers strike to demand more staff

On May 31, workers at Eurotunnel's French terminal took strike action to demand the company employ more staff. The strike began at 9:15 a.m. at the Calais terminal, as pickets blocked the entrance with around 10 to 15 cars. Services from France to Britain were halted and traffic in the opposite direction was delayed. A spokeswoman for Eurotunnel said, "Trains are running but it is a reduced service because French train crews are involved in the strike. In France, there is no-one travelling to Britain because the check-in is totally blocked." She said that the company did not know how long the dispute would last.

French museum workers continue dispute

Museum staff in Paris continued their strike this week to demand more staff and a reduction in their workload. On May 28, after 10 days on strike, workers voted to continue their action. Meetings between trade union representatives and Culture Ministry officials failed to find an end to the dispute. The museum employees are demanding that the government employ 1,000 more workers, end the system of temporary job contracts and guarantee job security.

The strike has closed museums such as the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay, as well as the Arc de Triomphe and Pantheon monuments, and the National Archives. The action has also widened beyond Paris, with staff at museums, castles and monuments in other parts of the country in dispute as well.

A prolonged strike would have its biggest impact in the weeks ahead as the summer tourist season gets into full swing. Last week, the Louvre said it has so far lost 3 million francs (about US$500,000), and that 100,000 visitors had not been able to enter the museum due to the strike. The museum said that it would now cancel several cultural events and would lay off several restaurant and shop workers, as well as guides.

Czech workers demonstrate against unemployment

On June 1, 3,000 people—including miners, textile workers, students and unemployed—participated in a demonstration in Frydek-Mistek, in the North Moravia region of the Czech Republic. The demonstration was called by the trade unions to protest the inaction of the social-democratic government in the face of growing unemployment. Mining regions in North Moravia are the worst hit, with unemployment close to 20 percent (8.8 percent is the average for the republic).

The social democrats had promised before the last year's elections to revitalise the economy, but the economic slump has continued. There is a growing radicalisation among miners and other workers in North Moravia to these conditions, but to date it remains under the control of the trade unions. Opinion polls show the right-wing ODS holding its position at 26 percent; the social democrats of the CSSD at 22 percent, down from 32 percent last year; and the Stalinists of the KSCM gaining somewhat, from 13 percent to 16.5 percent.

Polish government agreement ends miners' protests

On May 26, following several weeks of protests, the Polish government agreed to increase redundancy payments for miners leaving the coal industry. The Labour and Economy ministries said they would introduce programmes to help miners find new jobs, and that the government would spend an extra 400 million zloty ($100 million) on enhanced redundancy payments. The amount is to be loaned to the state's coal firms in the form of repayable credits. The proposals are expected to receive a hostile response from the Finance Ministry, which had proposed to cut the public deficit by closing half the country's 50 mines with the loss of 60,000 jobs.

The extra money will mean that 16,500 miners will now leave the industry this year instead of the projected 8,500. Meanwhile, the government is involved in another labour dispute with nurses and workers at a state arms factory who are demanding more pay. Last week, a number of nurses occupied the Labour Ministry, and five of them began a hunger strike.

Farmers in Poland begin road blockades

On May 27, farmers in Poland began a nation-wide campaign of road blockades to demand that the government give more support to farming and the

© World Socialist Web Site

countryside. In several areas police broke up blockades, and re-routed traffic around others. Andrzej Lepper, the leader of Self-Defence farming union, said that the farmers would attempt to block four frontier posts to prevent trucks from crossing Poland's western border with Germany.

Farmers' representatives are calling for the introduction of higher tariffs on grain and dairy imports from the European Union. Other demands include the state purchasing more produce from farmers to help stabilise prices and a freeze on loan repayments. It has been reported that Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek is to discuss with his cabinet the possibility of the state purchasing more Polish farm products. The present campaign is a continuation of a 10-day campaign of road blockades by farmers in February. One factor exacerbating the farmers' plight has been Russia's economic crisis. Russia is Poland's main market for agriculture products.

Irish fire fighters set to strike

Ireland's 1,100 full-time regional fire fighters could take industrial action beginning June 3 to demand more pay, and in opposition to proposed increases in productivity. Last week, the fire fighters voted nine to one to support their colleagues in Dublin who had already agreed to strike. An official of the SIPTU trade union representing the workers said, "We would expect this to be all-out strike action." However, 1,800 part-time fire fighters will not be striking and were not invited to take part in the ballot. Dublin's Labour Court recommended that fire fighters accept a 7 percent pay rise plus 2 percent for increased productivity. Local authorities have agreed these recommendations, but the productivity increases have been opposed by the fire fighters. The Labour Court is due to meet again in an effort to reach an agreement and prevent strike action.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site