

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

10 June 1999

French museum workers strike ends

The 21-day strike by museum and other tourist workers in Paris ended June 8. The Culture Ministry announced that the dispute had been settled and that workers would return to their jobs the next day.

The dispute began in protest against a shortage of staff at the museums. Culture Ministry officials said that only a few new jobs would be created as part of the deal. It said that workers who had been faced with job losses would now be assured of a job. The workers will be paid a portion of their wages for the days that they were on strike as part of the settlement.

During the dispute, the Louvre, Musée D'Orsay, Cluny and Picasso museums were closed as well several monuments such as the Arc de Triomphe and the Pantheon. The National Archives were also closed as a result of the strike. An estimated 320,000 people would have normally visited the Louvre in that period. The strike cost the museums about 16 million francs (\$2.5 million) in lost revenue.

Channel Tunnel workers strike to demand more staff and pay

A four-day strike by French Channel Tunnel workers over staffing levels ended on June 4. Unions representing the workers said that Eurotunnel management had agreed to employ six more workers, but had rejected demands for an increase in pay. Eurotunnel has withdrawn a threat to sack 54 strikers, but is to suspend three employees for a month. The firm claimed that the staff blocked tollbooths on the French side of the tunnel at the start of the dispute on May 31. The strike led to severe delays in cross-channel car services, but did not affect Eurostar passenger services to Paris and Brussels.

British junior doctors conference sanctions strike action

Last week the British Medical Association's Junior Doctors' Conference supported a resolution calling for a ballot of all 30,000 junior members for industrial

action. The BMA's Junior Doctors Committee is expected to hold the ballot in September. The chair of the committee, Andrew Hobart, said, "Junior doctors are furious. We are fed up and at the end of our tether."

The strike ballot has been called to protest government delays in reducing doctors' hours of work and increasing out-of-hours pay. Doctors are also angry that pledges to improve catering and accommodation facilities have still not been met.

A recent survey of 2,000 junior doctors found that 95 percent supported taking strike action. One in five said that they were ready to take industrial action this year. The last strike by junior doctors was held in 1975.

In 1991, doctors representatives and the then Conservative government agreed to a deal which stipulated that by 1996 no junior would be working more than 56 hours a week. Today, one in six still work longer hours than that. A junior doctor can earn as little as £4.02 an hour when working overtime, on-call or during holidays.

London airport workers turn down pay offer

Workers at Stansted Airport near London rejected a 2.4 percent pay offer this week and voted to take strike action. The 380 workers—baggage handlers, check-in staff and flight dispatchers—are employed by Servisair Plc. The GMB union representing the workers is to hold talks with Servisair on June 10, following a request by the company.

Servisair has refused to say if it would be increasing the pay offer. The operator of the airport, BAA, said that a strike by the Servisair workers would not result in its closure.

Romanian workers protest, strike against layoffs and conditions

On June 3, 2,000 metal workers in the Romanian town of Iasi attempted to occupy a local government office to protest plans to lay off 65 percent of the work force at their factory. The demonstration was the culmination of four days of protests against the

redundancies. A Czech firm has bought the plant and is seeking to restructure its operation.

The dispute follows that of workers at two plants in the Transylvanian town of Brasov, who recently protested against the threat to close a number of plants in the city. The previous day 10,000 workers from two of the factories held a demonstration outside local government offices to demand that the state provide support to keep the plants open. One of the plants, the state tractor maker Tractorul, has been granted a \$3.2 million credit and will be allowed to remain open; while the truck manufacturer Roman was granted the equivalent of \$6 million.

The credits are part of the government's plan to privatise and restructure the firms. The plants have accumulated debts of \$165 million and incurred losses of \$19 million last year. Since 1989, some 46,000 workers at the two plants have been made redundant.

They were joined on the demonstration by a delegation of workers from the aircraft builder IAR, in the local town of Ghimbav. The IAR workers were protesting against a government decision not to offer the plant support, which will lead to its closure. On the same day, the Supreme Court of Justice issued a ruling banning a strike by Bucharest underground rail workers demanding better pay and conditions. Veterinarians have taken action and teachers are also threatening to do so.

Kenyan refuse workers strike

A thousand employees of Kenya Refuse Handlers went on strike on Sunday, June 6 demanding payment of three months' wages arrears. The workers are employed in Nairobi to keep the Kenyan capital's central business district clean.

Strike leader James Makana said the company owes the work force 17 million shillings in salary arrears. Kenyan Refuse Handlers Managing Director Elizabeth Osongo held the city council responsible for not paying 55 million shillings for the services they had received and starving the company of funds.

Strike continues at university teaching hospital in Zambia

Strike action continues at Lusaka's University Teaching Hospital (UTH), Zambia, involving 500 members of the National Union of Health and Allied Workers. The strike started on May 27, with the hospital workers demanding salary increments of

between 32 to 34 percent backdated to January. While visiting the hospital, Minister of Health Nkandu Luo refused to address the work force, saying that the time had not come for her to intervene. Doctor Elwyn Chomba, UTH executive director, appealed to the hospital workers for an immediate return to work and that management would go round the wards to make sure a 100 percent return had taken place.

Nurses made their opposition clear, saying management cannot expect a return until their demands are met. Zambian Congress of Trade Unions Acting President Japhet Moonde said that the situation at the hospital had reached an alarming level, and that the solution rested with the government to find the money and clear the arrears. On May 28 the Zambian government threatened to de-register some trade unions, saying they were circumventing labour laws by not following established dispute resolution procedure.



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