

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

17 June 1999

Unofficial action at Land Rover, England

A series of unofficial stoppages struck the Land Rover production facilities at Longbridge, Solihull as workers protested plans to add 15 minutes to the Monday through Thursday shifts and a six-hour shift on Fridays to meet rising demand for Freelander and Discovery models.

The actions were against a flexible working agreement, which received union backing in December. Under threat of closure the agreement, under which staff would not be paid extra but would get time off when demand was slower, was voted for by 70 percent of the work force.

Land Rover has threatened workers with pay cuts and disciplinary action if the protests continue. Dieter Udelhoven, the new managing director, wrote to the 10,000 workers at the plant, warning that the factory will have no future if workers persist with industrial action. He said there would be no disciplinary action this time, but warned future stoppages that breached the deal would lead to pay cuts and other disciplinary action. "Please remember, we will not have a future if we resort to industrial action when we have a problem to solve," he added.

The only comment from Steve Galant, Land Rover convenor for the TGWU general union, was that the company "are reminding us of the agreement, which is a reasonable response". The union's automotive official, Tony Woodley, has been placed in charge of the talks in an attempt to bring the dissident workers into line.

British union takes right to strike dispute to Strasbourg

Britain's biggest trade union UNISON is asking the European Court in Strasbourg to rule that it is lawful to strike over plans to transfer workers to another employer who threatened to cut their terms and conditions.

The appeal is a challenge to a ruling by Britain's Court of Appeal last year that it was unlawful for

London hospital cleaners to strike over concerns that a private consortium, taking over a new hospital for a National Health Service Trust, would reduce their pension and holiday rights.

The ruling was made on the basis of anti-union legislation drawn up under the previous Conservative government, which has been left untouched by Labour. UNISON is asking the European Court of Human Rights to review this legislation as a "fundamental attack on the right to strike".

In the dispute concerned, the union had the full backing from its members at the hospital but the trust won a High Court injunction to stop the strike. The union then went to the Court of Appeal and lost. In October 1998 the House of Lords, Britain's highest court, refused to hear the union's case against the Court of Appeal ruling.

Further strike threat to Eurotunnel

The British Rail and Maritime Transport union (RMT) is to ballot members on the high-speed Eurostar train services for industrial action over pay and conditions. The action involves some 200 station and maintenance staff at London's Waterloo station. It follows a strike by French train crews that ended last Thursday and resulted in the blockading of Calais port on a Bank Holiday. RMT members will receive ballot papers next weekend and will have until June 24 to return them.

The union says any industrial action would have a severe effect on Eurostar trains during their most profitable summer period. The dispute arises from the company reneging on promises made in 1996 to rectify anomalies in wage levels compared with other workers in the sector. Eurostar management is refusing to negotiate with the unions.

Strike threat by Irish Local Authority and hospital workers

Employers and trade union leaders representing craft workers at local authorities and hospitals have held a

series of meetings in an attempt to avert strike action scheduled for Monday, June 22. Workers at hospitals and local authorities around the country disrupted hospital services last month in a series of unofficial strikes. The strikes were carried out against the inclusion of a productivity clause in a new pay deal negotiated between trade union representatives and the Labour Relations Commission in April. When this was presented in a ballot, workers rejected the deal and voted in favour of strike action.

Parisian museum workers strike ends

The strike by museum workers in Paris has ended after 20 days. The workers had demanded more staff, especially security guards, and an end to a system of temporary contracts. Union leaders agreed to suspend the strike after talks with the Culture Ministry. The strike shut down such world famous tourist attractions as the Orsay, the Louvre and the Picasso museums as well as monuments such as the Arc de Triomphe and the Pantheon at a peak time in the tourist season.

Small business owners who depend on income from museum visitors said the strike has cut business in half, and tourism officials said they are worried it could leave permanent scars on the industry. The equivalent of \$2.6 million was lost during the walkout, the longest museum strike in French history, the Culture Ministry said.

Kenyan pupils strike

Five hundred students were sent home and the school closed indefinitely after pupils went on strike at the Kangaru Secondary School, in Embu, Kenya, on June 12. The strike was in protest at the school administrator's refusal to give the pupils a half term break. Local education officials' attempts to calm the rioting pupils and get them back to class failed. The headmaster then ordered them to leave the premises and the police were brought in. Police arrested 21 pupils accused of having planned to set the school on fire.

At the Mutune Girls Primary School in Kitue, parents entered the premises to remove their 400 children, then demonstrated on the streets in protest over the mismanagement of 180,000 shillings contributed to the school for buying text books. The demonstration rallied at the district education office.

Nigerian students protest

Students from the Federal College of Agriculture, Animal Health and Production Technology in Ibadan,

Nigeria, were attacked by the police and arrested after protesting against the closure of the college on June 14 on the basis of a directive from the provost. They were also expressing their grievances at the lack of a library, auditorium, Student Union bus and an electricity generating plant on the campus. Student Union Speaker Oladele Hakeem said they were carrying out a peaceful demonstration when they suddenly saw the police on the campus. "After we had left the campus they attacked our bus and injured our students in the Iyaganku area." At a meeting with the state governor the students called for the resignation of the college provost and the research director.



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