

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

13 July 2000

Retail staff workers strike in Germany over pay cuts

Thousands of shop workers took strike action July 10 in a pay protest. The action, called by the HBV and DAG unions, began in Dusseldorf but spread to include 3,250 workers in the German states of Baden-Wuerttemberg, Berlin, Saarland, Rhineland-Palatinate, Bavaria, Hesse and North Rhine-Westphalia.

The HBV rejected a wage offer of 2.5 percent retroactive to July 1 and a one-off payment of \$81.60 for May and June. This offer translates into a pay increase of only 1.9 percent when spread over the year. The union has also called for a slightly higher lump-sum payment than companies are offering.

Further talks are planned this week between unions and retail employers in Rhineland-Palatinate.

Irish aerospace workers begin strike action

On July 7, production workers at Short Brothers Plc in Belfast walked off the job in a pay dispute. The strike was the first in a series of weekly stoppages lasting several hours and brought production to a standstill. The action lasted 4.5 hours and involved some 5,000 workers on four sites in Belfast and surrounding suburbs. It is the first strike to halt all production in 22 years.

The company made a final offer of a 3 percent wage increase for the next four years, with a promise to review the deal if inflation increases. Workers rejected the offer and want a two-year agreement with a higher wage increase. Canadian owners Bombardier have threatened job losses if the strike continues.

Postal workers in Republika Srpska strike

Postal workers in the Bosnian-Serb enclave of Republika Srpska took strike action on July 7 in an ongoing dispute over better working conditions and pay. The workers first struck on June 26 for one hour. Their demands have not been met and they pledged to increase the level of industrial action. Unemployment in the region is more than 50 percent.

Autoworkers in UK reject working hours arrangement

Autoworkers at Peugeot's car plant in Coventry are set to strike after rejecting a new working hours and shift pattern agreed between management and the trade unions. The 3,000 workers voted to reject the deal at a meeting on July 7 and are set to strike on July 27. It will be the first strike action at the plant since 1979, when it was open by Chrysler. If agreement is not reached an indefinite strike is to begin on August 21.

The deal was endorsed by Transport and General Workers' Union chief negotiator Tony Woodley, after months of negotiations with Peugeot. Unions and management claimed it would reduce working hours from 39 hours to 36, ensuring the "shortest working week in British car manufacturing". However, the deal increases the hours worked at weekends and would end overtime payments for the Friday evening shift introduced just two years ago.

Mass layoffs threatened at Kilombero Sugar Company, Tanzania

Three thousand workers have been on all-out strike at the Kilombero Sugar Company, Tanzania, since June 5, when riot police took control of the estate. The workers are demanding that the Durban-based Illovo Sugar Group honour a "voluntary agreement" on hours and wages made prior to the company's take-over of the plant.

The new management refused, and two weeks ago Illovo threatened to pull out its investment if the government did not resolve the strike. The government has threatened to "retire" all 3,000 Kilombero sugar plantation workers on terminal benefits, leaving the company free to rehire on a new contract. Riot police are currently guarding the two Kilombero farms and the sugar processing plant.

South African workers down tools in pay dispute with Boardmans

Two-thirds of South African staff employed by

Boardmans, the Pick 'n' Pay-owned domestic goods retailer, have downed tools over wages and conditions of employment. The striking workers are allied to the Independent Commercial Hospitality and Allied Workers Union (Ichawu) and are demanding a wage increase of R250 (\$38) a month. Isaac Motaung, the company's human resources director, said the group had offered a R200 increase across the board, representing a 9.3 percent rise on average wages. The group has made a final offer of a R209 a month increase, which was rejected by the union.

Nigerian civil servants continue strike action

One worker was killed and several others injured in Lagos last week, as civil servants protested against the arrest of six of their colleagues. Ayodele Akele was released from detention, but five others, including two women, remained in custody. Governor Bola Tinubu denies ordering the arrest of the strikers and claims to be investigating where the order originated.

In a statement Akele insisted that security operatives picked him up and kept him incommunicado. "I was shoved into a Peugeot car and sandwiched between two men who abducted me to prevent me from knowing where I was being taken to," he said, describing his arrest as a "gangster type situation".

The strikers are demanding 7,500 naira (\$72) as monthly minimum wage but the government has stipulated it only pay the 5,500 naira agreed by the governors of Nigeria's 36 states. The strike has now spread to most of the states.

Nigerian doctors threaten strike action

Nigerian hospital doctors—members of the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD)—have threatened a national strike unless the federal government meets their three-point demands on pay and conditions. The action will begin on July 24, when their 21-working day notice to the government expires. In an ultimatum addressed to Minister of Health Dr. Tim Menakaya the doctors warned that if there was no agreement before then "members of the association will embark on a total withdrawal of services without further notice".

The doctors are demanding increases in pay for call duty, chemical supplementation and other allowances. They also point out that earnings for the period of the last NARD strike between December 1998 and April 1999 have not yet been paid. The Association of

Medical and Dental Officers (AMDO), Kwara state branch, had also threatened to begin an indefinite strike, to force the state government to redress the appalling conditions of health services in the state.



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