

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

14 June 2001

Thousands protest in Paris against job losses

On June 9, more than 20,000 demonstrators took to the streets in Paris, France to protest against a series of large-scale lay offs. Recent announcements of job losses have included those at the food group Danone, the indebted airline Air Liberté and the British retailer Marks & Spencer.

The march and demonstration was held in the east of Paris, and many of those in attendance chanted slogans demanding job security be given priority over profits.

The protest was held five days before a parliamentary vote on a bill proposing to impose limited restrictions on profitable companies planning large-scale layoffs. French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin has said he will oppose the proposals.

Refuse disposal workers in Brighton, England sacked for protesting changes to shift rotas

Refuse collectors in Brighton and Hove in southern England took unofficial strike action on June 11, in a dispute over new shift patterns. The waste disposal company Sita employs the workers.

The strike is the latest in a series of disputes between workers and the company, which was awarded the town's refuse disposal contract by Brighton and Hove Council.

The recent dispute began when Sita suspended a group of workers who refused to follow the new shift patterns, stating that they were unworkable. The company is then alleged to have suspended the workers, leading to dozens more walking off the job in protest and occupying the main refuse depot in Hollingdean.

In response, the company has sacked approximately 140 workers, members of the GMB trade union. The Hollingdean depot remains under occupation.

Brighton and Hove Council suspended refuse collection in the town and gave Sita 48 hours to resolve the dispute or have its contract terminated.

Train guards in UK vote to strike in protest at

downgrading of safety

On June 12, train guards in the UK voted to strike for 24 hours on June 25 and July 4. The guards are employed by 23 private train companies and the strikes are expected to bring virtually all rail services across the country to a halt.

The Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union called the strikes after an overwhelming vote in favour of industrial action to preserve the guards' primary responsibility for passenger safety on trains. The guards complain that they have been downgraded to "Kit Kat sellers", with passenger safety being placed on already overburdened drivers.

The guards voted by an average of four-to-one in favour of strikes across the 23 train operators. RMT members at two other rail companies—Great Eastern and the Isle of Wight's Island Line—voted against industrial action.

A recent survey published by the RMT showed a high level of public support for the guards' concerns. One of the main findings was that rail passengers want a train guard to be responsible for safety in the event of an incident.

Greek aviation staff to strike for improved contract

Civil aviation authority workers in Greece are to strike for 24 hours on June 15, and will hold a further 48-hour strike on June 29. The workers are demanding an improvement in their contract, including additional benefits and better pay.

The action was called by the OSYPA federation, which includes several aviation workers' unions. The industrial action is expected to have a widespread impact, as it will be held when the tourist season enters its high point.

Supermarket workers in the Irish Republic vote to strike over pay

Tesco supermarket workers in the Irish Republic are to take strike action at the end of June in a dispute over

pay. The stoppage will involve some 9,000 workers, who plan to picket the 75 Irish stores of chain, which also operates in the UK. The workers are members of the Mandate trade union and Ireland's Services and Professional Technical Union.

Gambian civil servants strike over transport fare increase

Gambian civil servants have called a strike to protest a government decision to increase public transport fares. The civil servants described the increment of one Dalasi (15.8 Dalasi=US \$1) in fares as a slap in the face for underpaid workers who have not received a wage increase for a long time.

One civil servant, speaking after the government announced the increase, said, "We are being pushed against the wall and we can take it no more. We will consult with our colleagues who are also suffering like us, for a possible strike action." Soon afterwards the strike was called.

Nigerian doctors to join nationwide strike

Doctors in the Nigerian capital Lagos decided last Thursday to join a strike over pay that has already caused widespread disruption to hospitals in other parts of the country.

The strike was called 11 days ago by the Nigerian Medical Association, which complains that doctors earn much less than the \$500 per month claimed by the government.

Until now, the strike had not been widely observed by locally employed doctors in Lagos, but that is now set to change—increasing the industrial unrest faced by the Nigerian government. As well as a strike by university lecturers, there has been a rise in food prices, widespread power cuts, and a fall in the value of Nigeria's currency, the Naira.



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