

# Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

6 September 2001

## **Shipyard workers in Glasgow, Scotland strike over job losses**

On September 5 about 1,200 shipyard workers employed at the Scotstoun shipyard on the Clyde River walked off the job to protest the announcement of over 1,000 job losses. The workers, employed by BAE Systems, later attended a mass meeting where they voted for a 24-hour strike and a ban on overtime.

The company had announced the lay-offs in June but talks have subsequently been held with the trade unions and government ministers to try to reduce the number of redundancies. Just 200 workers have accepted redundancy payments so far.

## **London Underground staff to strike in dispute over pay**

Train drivers on the London Underground subway are to be balloted for industrial action later this month in a dispute over pay. The workers, members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union, are in dispute with management over the latter's proposed 3.7 percent pay increase. The RMT say that wages are being held down as part of the plans to privatise the network.

A further 2,000 members of the train drivers union Aslef are also set to be balloted this month in a pay dispute. An Aslef official said that the rising cost of living in London had meant that train drivers had experienced an effective pay cut over the last three years. An independent analysis of train drivers' pay recently concluded that drivers should receive a pay increase of at least 4 percent.

## **Belgium airline pilots to continue strike action**

Pilots employed by the Belgium airline Sabena are set to continue their industrial action in protest at job losses by holding a 24 hour strike today.

The state-owned airline plans to lay-off some 1,600 workers as part of a restructuring plan based on returning the company to profitability by 2005.

The strike is set to see the cancellation and disruption of hundreds of flights. Sabena reported a 138.9 million

euro first-half net loss last month. This compared to a net loss of 83.6 million in the same period last year.

## **Royal Shakespeare Company staff in England vote to strike**

Technicians and other staff employed at the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon voted for strike action on August 30 to protest against job losses. More than 90 percent of staff have supported a ballot for strike action organised by the technicians union Bectu.

The RSC plans to shed some 70 jobs as part of a restructuring programme. Strike action would disrupt performances in the company's current summer festival season.

The union has called on RSC management to hold talks on the problems and has threatened to set a date for strike action this week unless negotiations begin. Bectu said last week that performances would be halted if the technicians, electricians, stagehands, costume and wardrobe staff strike.

Bectu has also announced that it will ballot staff at the Barbican Centre in London in the next few weeks for industrial action in a dispute over job losses.

## **Czech airline pilots strike called off**

A planned strike by Czech airline pilots was called off on August 30 after an agreement by unions and airline management over a new pay deal. The strike was due to start the following day.

The pilots are employed by the Czech national airline Ceske Aerolinie and had voted by a majority of around 80 percent in favour of strike action after rejecting an earlier management offer of 26 percent. The pilots had favoured an increase of 37 percent.

The deal reached between the pilots unions and Ceske Aerolinie management resulted in a pay increase of 30 percent.

It had been reported that pilots in other airlines in the SkyTeam Alliance, consisting of Air France, Delta Airlines, Alitalia, Aero Mexico and Korean Air, were

also preparing to support the strike of the Czech pilots. The pilots currently earn just £1,119 a month.

### **Strike by Zimbabwean engineering workers**

Workers at the engineering company Craster International (Pvt) Ltd have been locked out of the factory following their participation in a two-day strike called by the National Engineering Workers' Union (NEWU) on August 22 and 23. The strike was in support of a demand for wage increases of between 106 and 150 percent. The companies offered increases of between 80 and 123 percent.

Following an agreement between the NEWU and the companies, the workers at Craster's returned to work for one day but were locked out the following day. A spokesman for the workers said, "We were surprised to find the company gates locked and manned by security guards with batons, vicious dogs and firearms."

The company's executive chairman, Charles Mutyambizi, has written to the Ministry of Labour, Public Service and Social Welfare for authorization to sack the strikers. The workers have set up a camp outside Craster's premises and vow to remain there until the company takes them back.

### **Zimbabwean university staff and students strike**

More than 2000 students at Midland State University in Gweru are boycotting classes in protest against the government's proposal to increase student fees by 3000 percent. The government has also announced it will withdraw all state funding for students. Tuition fees at the university have risen from \$1'000 per year to \$30,000 for arts and \$35,000 for sciences.

The boycott coincides with a joint strike by lecturers and non-academic staff in support of their demand for a salary increase of 70 percent, in line with the cost of living increase. The manual workers at the university locked the lecture rooms and gathered at the administration block, waiting to be addressed by officials from the Ministry of Higher Education and Technology. They said the ministry had promised to pay an increase of 15 percent at the beginning of this year, but had then reneged on their promise, citing a shortage of funds.

The students crowded around the administration block, since most had not been formally registered or allocated halls of residence. "We have resolved as students that we will not attend lectures until our grievances are addressed and all proposed fee increases

reversed," said Mhimhize Gudu, president of the Students' Representative Council.

### **Strike of South African platinum workers enters its fourth week**

Workers at Northam, South Africa's fourth largest platinum producer, are now in their fourth week of strike action over their demand for a 15 percent pay increase. Management has offered nine percent. More than 90 percent of the labor force of 5,400 workers are supporting the strike.

Northam is the country's only "black empowerment" group in the platinum industry.



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