

# Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

11 October 2001

## **Moulinex workers march in Paris**

Thousands of Moulinex workers from all over France converged on Paris on October 5. Marching through the streets of the capital, the workers demanded government intervention to protect jobs at the bankrupt domestic appliance manufacturer's factories. The marchers made their way to the office of Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, where union leaders were holding talks.

Also joining the march was a delegation from the French appliance maker Seb, which submitted a partial takeover offer to salvage Moulinex.

Moulinex filed for bankruptcy in September after its main shareholder, the Italian firm Elettro Finanziaria, withdrew its backing for a £220 million rescue package. The company, Europe's third-largest domestic appliance maker, is £500 million in debt.

## **Electronics workers protest in north east England**

On October 6, more than 200 workers from the Tyneside electronics firm Viasystems held a march to demand more protection for workers who are being made redundant. Viasystems laid off its northeast England workforce last month when it called in the receivers and about 750 workers are set to lose their jobs.

Viasystems manufactures circuit boards. The company cited the global downturn in the electronics market as the reason behind its decision to close both its plants in North and South Tyneside.

The laid off workers marched through the South Shields area to call for more employment protection. Some of those attending claimed that they had not received earnings they were entitled to on redundancy pay from Viasystems. In some cases this amounted to more than £30,000.

## **Workers strike at Mozambique aluminium plant**

Over 800 workers at the Mozal aluminium smelting plant near the capital Maputo went on strike October 3 to demand an increase in wages, and payment in dollars

instead of the rapidly devaluing Mozambican currency. They also demanded increased hazard pay, shift bonuses, and subsidies to cover house rents and children's education.

The action is the second strike at Mozal this year. In response management has sent dismissal notices to most of the workforce. On October 4, 280 of the workers were laid off on and another 220 soon afterwards. South Africa's *Business Day* newspaper reported the total number of dismissals as 700.

The vice-president of investor and media relations at BHP Billiton, Michael Campbell, said 60 South African aluminium workers and 60 Mozambicans had been recruited to replace the dismissed employees. (BHP Billiton is among the original shareholders in Mozal, along with the Industrial Development Corporation and Japan's Mitsubishi Corporation.)

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa has pledged its support for its Mozambican counterpart, but so far this has been confined to lunchtime demonstrations.

## **Ugandan cleaners on sit-down strike**

Cleaning workers in the Mbale Municipality have gone launched a sit-down strike, protesting the non-payment of their wages for the last six months. The strikers are employed by Estates Managing Centre Ltd., which won the tender to collect garbage in the area in 1999.

The workers complain about their poor working conditions. One explained, "We clean the sewage channels with our fingers without any protective gear like gloves and gum boots. We have been exposed to so many risks without any penny." The strikers said that they have been patient for long "but no attention has been given to our plight."

Estates Manager, Peter Hitumira, blamed the Municipal Authorities for the dispute, stating that it had delayed paying his company for garbage collection.

## **Zimbabwean hospital cleaners suspended over**

## **strike**

Two hundred cleaners have been suspended at Harare Central Hospital, over their strike against low pay, which began on September 24. The cleaners are employees of Willsend Pvt Limited, which took over the cleaning of the hospital in May 2000. According to the cleaners the company hired 120 new workers to replace them. They claim they have been paid only ZW\$3,000 a month since July 2000, compared to the ZW\$6,500 they are supposed to be paid. (At current rates, with inflation of over 70 percent, ZW\$1,000 = US\$18)

The striking workers said riot police beat them up on October 3 while they were guarding their cleaning equipment, and had to flee the hospital grounds. Two days later, riot police ordered the strikers out of the hospital grounds.

The workers said they had served their employer, and the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, with the statutory two-week notice of their intention to strike, and had written to their trade union, the Commercial Workers' Union of Zimbabwe, and their employer's lawyers, Mucharehwa and Partners. Yet the letters of suspension pending dismissal served on October 4, make the claim that the strike was illegal.

The hospital has not been cleaned for almost two weeks and patients have complained of dirty wards and pools of water in the outpatients department.

### **Malawi health workers strike**

Medical staff at Malawi's main hospital, The Queen Elizabeth, are finishing their first week of strike action to demand an increase in pay and allowances. The strike, the latest in a series of public sector disputes in the country, has closed almost all the hospitals wards. Only the intensive care unit and operating theatres are still operational.



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