

# Workers Struggles: Europe, the Middle East and Africa

2 May 2002

## **Chambermaids in France continue strike**

Chambermaids in France are continuing the strike they began on March 7. The chambermaids, mostly African immigrants, are striking at the Novotel of Vangirard and other hotels of the Accor group, such as Ibis and Mercure, in the Paris region. The workers are protesting against low wages, working conditions and part-time work without contract.

During the dispute the SUD trade union has organised different actions like demonstrations, occupation of parts of the hotels and the management quarter of Accor.

The chambermaids are paid on the basis of the number of rooms they tidy up and clean during one hour. They work for a contractor, Arcane. Accor employs about 3,500 staff, often immigrants without papers, who live in great distress and poverty. Legal chambermaids of Accor are required to clean 16 chambers in eight hours, while the Arcane employed staff must clean 18 rooms in six hours. Many are forced to work overtime without payment.

## **General Medical Practitioners strike continues in France**

The General Medical Practitioners strike in France continued this week, when the CSMF and SML trade unions called for the closure of the medical practices from April 30 until May 6. Doctors are demanding that the government increase their consultation fees from 18.50 to 20 euros for a single consultation. The union said that after May 7, it expected that Chirac would be the next president and if his administration were not able to meet their demands, the dispute would be intensified.

## **Yoghurt factory workers strike in protest at bankruptcy of plant**

Two hundred and fifty workers of CBSA, a Yoghurt-factory based at Carbon-Blanc, a town near Bordeaux

in France, are without work.

On April 18 the factory was unable to continue production because they were not able to purchase milk from their suppliers. The factory has a debt of some 20 million euros. The workers began a strike and held a lock-in, after refusing to allow 10 factory managers to leave. The protest lock-in lasted one week.

As yet there has been no serious takeover bids made for the factory. The Bordeaux liquidation office has stated that the management of the factory has until May 10 to find a buyer or the factory will close and the workers will be made redundant.

## **German workers set to strike over pay in the Berlin/Brandenburg region**

Members of the IG Metall trade union in the Berlin/Brandenburg region have voted by a majority of more than 80 percent for strike action, after rejecting a pay increase of 3.3 percent. Workers in the Baden-Wuerttemberg region are also expected to vote to strike this week.

The vote is part of an ongoing campaign to win an increase in pay. Strikes have been held in other regions of Germany in the last month. Workers at DaimlerChrysler and Porsche in the Berlin/Brandenburg region could now take strike action over the next week. The engineering and electronics union, which has over 2.8 million members, initially called for a pay increase of 6.5 percent but has since lowered this to 4 percent. The employers have increased their offer from an initial 2 percent for this year and next to 3.3 percent for 13 months and a one-time cash payment.

## **UK postal workers union threatens national strike**

The Communication Workers Union has threatened to hold a national strike next month in a dispute with the postal group Consignia over pay and deliveries. The union has stated that a 24-hour strike will be held on

May 8, the first such national strike since 1996. The union has said that a proposed 2.2 percent pay rise should not be linked to an agreement on longer delivery spans.

The union and Consignia are expected to hold talks on the new pay deal and deliveries shortly. The CWU said that the proposals by the company would prevent the trial of any union proposals for the future of postal deliveries. John Keggie, a CWU union representative, said: "Our patience has run out. Our members' pay award is six months overdue and the business wants us to begin a mediation process that could last for months." Keggie also said that talks would also be held with the ACAS conciliation service in a "last ditch effort" to avoid strikes.

### **Local authority workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland reject pay offer**

Public sector unions representing local government workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland stated this week that industrial action could be held from June 10 if local authority employers do not increase their pay offer. Local authority employers have offered an increase of 3 percent, but many local authority staff in a union organised consultative ballot rejected this.

A strike could potentially involve more than a million council workers, including social workers, garbage men, school caretakers and cleaners.

### **General Strike in Burkina Faso**

Unions in Burkina Faso called a two-day general strike last week, involving both public and private sector workers. Workers in telecoms, the power industry and banking took action and some schools were closed down. According to AFP the capital Ouagadougou was seriously affected, as well as the country's second city, Bobo-Dioulasso.

Workers were demanding a 25 percent pay rise and a 30 percent cut in income tax to offset a sharp rise in the cost of living. Secretary general of the Burkina National Workers' Federation Laurent Ouedrago said, "This strike is a warning. If none of our demands are satisfied, we'll take further action."

Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in Africa, lacking in resources and suffering from recurring drought. Average income is \$230 per annum. Recently the largest gold mine in the country was closed due to falling prices.

### **State sector workers strike in Nigeria**

Civil servants in Oyo State, Nigeria, have taken strike action over the state's refusal to pay the monthly minimum wage of N6,500 (\$57) due to its financial difficulties. The state's chief judge granted an injunction restraining the workers from continuing their action, but they remained on strike. Alhaji Adesina, the state governor, insisted that the strike was illegal and told the workers they would not be paid for the days they failed to report for duty.

Public sector workers in Plateau State embarked on indefinite strike action, despite a court order taken out against them. They are protesting non-payment of salaries for the months of December, January, February and March. The local State Commissioner of Finance and Economic Planning, Emmanuel Agati, declared that the state was experiencing a chronic cash shortage that he described as "a serious quagmire." There had been an "unexpected" drop in the federal (national) allocation to the state and it was impossible to make the salary payments.



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