

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

4 July 2002

Italian museum workers protest against privatisation plans

On June 29, museums throughout Italy were hit by industrial action as staff struck for 24 hours. Museum and heritage workers held a demonstration outside the Colosseum and held up banners with slogans such as “Colosseum for Sale,” and “No to privatisation, yes to full-time employment”.

In April the government of Silvio Berlusconi passed a decree proposing to place state property into private hands, either through concessions or sales. Consequently some of Italy’s most important historic and cultural sites, such as the Colosseum, face privatisation.

French baggage handlers continue airport strike

Airport security-staff at Orly Airport in Paris are continuing the go slow they began on June 27. The strikers are employed by ASA (Assistance Service Aéroport), a sub-contracting company that works for ADP (Aéroports de Paris). ASA employees are demanding the employment of more staff and a wage increase. On June 29, the employees of Alysia Handling, a baggage-transporting company, joined the strike for the same demands. The following day, SIFA-employees, who do the same job as the ASA, joined the strike at Orly west.

Factory workers in Dublin, Ireland strike to protest severance pay

Nearly 400 manufacturing workers are on strike in Ireland in a dispute over their severance pay with the Irish Glass Bottle company. The staff are employed at the company’s plant in Ringsend, South Dublin and the factory is set to close next month, with the loss of 380 jobs. The workers are claiming that the company has reneged on promises agreed at Dublin’s Labour Court.

On July 2, the striking workers marched to the Dublin offices of the Irish Business and Employers’ Confederation.

UK airport baggage handlers to ballot for

industrial action

Airport baggage handlers and check-in staff in the UK are to be balloted this week for strike action in a dispute over pay. The staff are employed at some of the busiest airports in the UK such as Gatwick, Heathrow and Manchester. The 1,500 workers are members of the GMB trade union and are expected to take industrial action at the end of the month, which would coincide with the start of the school holidays, if they vote for a strike.

The union is in dispute with Aviance, part of the Go Ahead group, which runs ground services at airports. The company has offered the staff a pay increase of just 1.5 percent plus a lump sum payment of £150. The union is calling for a pay rise of three percent and a larger lump sum.

Local government workers launch nationwide strike in South Africa

Around 120,000 local government workers began an indefinite national strike in South Africa on July 2, to fight management’s decision to impose a seven percent wage increase this year and to impose pay levels for the next three years without negotiation. The strikers are members of the South African Municipal Workers’ Union (SAMWU), employed in jobs such as street cleaning and refuse collection, road mending, water and electricity supply, and sewage treatment. The minimum wage for the workers is currently set at R1,900 per month (\$190). The seven percent increase was negotiated and agreed with a much smaller union, the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union (IMATU), which represents workers on higher grades.

SAMWU has demanded a 10 percent or R300 increase and a R2,200 minimum wage. This compares with the salaries of municipal managers in rural towns of up to R45,000 per month. The average employer’s contribution to the workers’ retirement fund is just 12 percent. Pension contributions are often discriminatory, with some white workers getting 28 percent

contributions from the employer. Many local government workers cannot afford to join any such schemes, in spite of the dangerous conditions in which they work.

Management has sought to undermine the strike. Before it began they declared that their decision to impose an average 12.5 percent increase in local rates (tax) for all households was caused by the wage increase. They have also threatened that workers who strike will be faced with disciplinary action and dismissal, despite the fact that the strike is legal under South Africa's strict labour laws.

Nigerian teachers set to restart strike

Teachers in the Nigerian state of Anambra are to go on indefinite strike again, only three months after the end of a previous five-month strike, due to the state government's failure to pay salaries.

Austin Nwosu, Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) state chairman, told a news conference in Awka that since the previous strike was suspended in March the state government had not paid teachers' salaries and allowed six months of arrears to build up. It had also failed to release N8.8 million (\$73,000) to clear the salary arrears from May 2001 or to pay the N30.7 million owed to the union as check-off dues.

At the same time, large numbers of secondary school pupils in Anambra State have taken to the streets in protest at the introduction of N3, 000 school fees. Education in the state secondary schools was made free in 2000, but the state government now insists it must charge fees to pay salaries and avoid a collapse of its education system. The state government claims to have reduced the fees to N1,950 since the start of the demonstrations but this has not caused the students to stop their protests.



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