

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

29 August 2002

TV technicians strike in France

TV technicians employed by the France 3 media outlet have been in dispute with the company since August 20. Since then technicians on the outlet's three news-journals are only sending local bulletins. The technicians, who produce the national bulletins and several other transmissions of the France 3 channel, are preventing transmission of the national news.

The members of the CGT and CFDT trade unions are protesting against the planned reduction of work schedules. Management of France 3 intend to stop some programmes and to charge just one of the two production branches with producing sport programmes. Workers fear that this would result in a reduction of staff, hitting those without continuous contracts, who are employed mainly to do commissioned work. An estimated one-third of technicians has are hired on this basis.

EasyJet baggage handlers in UK ballot for action

Baggage handlers and cabin crew employed at EasyJet, the UK budget airline, are being balloted for strike action in a dispute over pay and union recognition. The dispute involves 110 baggage handlers at Luton Airport and a further 300 cabin crew at Luton, Gatwick, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Belfast.

The TGWU trade union states that it has attempted to negotiate a pay deal with EasyJet since May, but the company refuses to recognise it. According to the union, EasyJet is also calling for any pay deal to be linked with performance. EasyJet has imposed a 1.3 percent pay rise, pending the outcome of the ballot, which closes on September 2. A few weeks later cabin crew ballot results will be announced.

Workers at UK tractor plant reject redundancy offer

On August 22, employees at Coventry's Massey Ferguson tractor plant in the Midlands voted to reject a redundancy package and are to be balloted for strike action. American company Agco, which intends to

relocate production to France, owns the plant. A thousand workers attended a mass meeting and rejected the company offer.

The decision to close the plant in England and relocate is expected to save the firm an estimated \$25 million by the year 2004. One of the suggested reasons behind the move was the failure of the UK to sign up to the euro. The company claims the plant is currently running at just 50 percent capacity.

Tyremakers strike in Mozambique

Workers at the Mabor tyre factory in Maputo, Mozambique, went on strike on August 19 to demand a substantial increase in wages and other benefits. Talks between management and the trade unions had produced no agreement as the strike entered its third day. The workers are determined to safeguard their rights, as they fear that the company may soon declare itself bankrupt.

The local trade union committee spokesperson, Eduardo Licumba, said on August 21 that the workers were willing to talk, but that the strike would continue until employers met their demands, which include a 150 percent increase in the minimum wage paid at the factory, and reinstatement of bonuses the workers had lost. He explained, "The last wage adjustment was in 1999, and since then there has been no increase." Licumba also accused the Mabor employers of refusing to sign collective contracts so that wages would be adjusted whenever the company's finances allow. Such contracts became standard in Mozambique in the 1980s.

The workers are also demanding an end to discrimination on wages. At present, some of the foreign workers receive part of their wages in hard currency, while this is denied to the others.

Regarding the risk of bankruptcy, Licumba said, "We do not want any declaration of bankruptcy without us being heard, and if the owners sell the company, we do not know whether we will receive our due

compensation. We want to solve the problem in such a way that when any new owners come in, everything will be already sorted out”.

The company’s general manager, Hermenegildo Gamito, said, “It’s true that the company is going through difficulties, but it is not bankrupt. The state is the company’s major shareholder, and we cannot, as yet, talk of bankruptcy.”

Teachers strike for backpay in Eastern Cape, South Africa

Many of the 80 or more schools in the Grahamstown, Port Alfred and Alexandria areas have been subject to strikes by the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) from August 26. The strikes are part of a campaign to demand that the provincial education department pays outstanding money owing to about 7,000 Eastern Cape teachers.

Around 30 SADTU executive members held a sit-in demonstration in the department’s Grahamstown district office. SADTU Port Alfred branch chairman Tanduxolo Moleli said that around 400 Grahamstown union members would be called to a rally at the offices at noon on August 27.

Hospital workers continue strike in Lagos, Nigeria

Non-medical staff at Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) has been on strike since July 22. The workers are demanding implementation of the Harmonised Tertiary Institutions Salary Structure (HATISS), which was backed by the Federal Government and should have been paid from April this year. All junior workers, including cooks, laundry hands, storekeepers, clerks and other non-medical junior staff are involved in the strike.

Hospital management is employing casual labour to carry to do the work of striking employees. In the catering section of the hospital, local cooks, referred to as “Aganyin”, have take over kitchen duties.

The hospital’s Chief Medical Director Professor Tolu Odukoya, said that cooking does not require any form of professionalism, and that anybody could cook. At the same time, he claimed that professionally qualified caterers were on hand to monitor and inspect the cooking.

The workers said that following their national protest last year to demand the federal government extend a 22 percent salary increase given to their counterparts in the universities, the government had agreed to extend the

payment to them.

The Chairman of the Non-Medical Health Workers Union of the Federation, Musashiru Ayinde, said that the government had released money in April this year to pay the increase for their members in teaching hospitals, research institutes and other government agencies.

He cited such institutions as the National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), the Psychiatric Hospital, Yaba, Lagos, University College Hospital (UCH), Ibadan, the Asaba Medical Centre, Asaba, Gwagwalada Teaching Hospital, Abuja among those that have complied with the HATISS agreement.

The union said that it had met with the director, who admitted that money had been released, but denied that it could be used to implement the HATISS agreement, arguing that it was not tagged and must be paid into management accounts, until it had been clarified by the ministry. The union said that even after this had taken place, the LUTH management still did not implement the payments, and that management had taken some of the money.

Uganda sugarcane cutters shot by police

One person has been killed and two wounded after police opened fire on striking sugarcane cutters in the Masindi district of Uganda. The cane cutters work a seasonal five-month contract. They went on strike when the government began to tax them as though they worked all year round.

Since the shooting the government has said that it will refund 4,000 of the 10,000 Ugandan shillings (\$5.60) that the workers have had to pay in tax. Betty Adima of the local administration said the shooting would be investigated but that the workers who burnt down some 247 hectares of sugar cane would be prosecuted.



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