

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

1 August 2003

Bus drivers strike in southern England to continue

Seven hundred bus drivers, engineers and cleaners employed by Stagecoach Devon in southern England are to continue their ongoing dispute with four days of strike action on August 7, 9, 11 and 13.

The employees, members of the Rail Maritime and Transport Union, are calling for an increase in pay from the current £5.93 to £6.50 per hour and have already held nine days of industrial action. The company has offered to increase pay to £6.50 (\$US10.47) an hour but on the basis it is phased in over two years and tied to changes in working conditions.

Ferry workers in Scotland ballot for action over pay

Ferry workers employed by Caledonian MacBrayne (Calmac), which operates from Scotland, are currently being balloted for strike action in a dispute over pay. Industrial action by the 450 members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union would be held by the end of August and affect 13 of the company's 30 ships.

The union has rejected an initial 3.5 percent pay deal offered by the company stating that 1 percent of the deal is performance-related. Further talks between the union and Calmac are set for August 1.

British Airways and unions agree deal to resolve wildcat dispute at Heathrow airport

After days of talks, British Airways and unions representing check-in and customer-support staff at London's Heathrow airport have agreed to a deal over the company's plans to introduce electronic "clock-in" swipe cards.

BA's attempts to impose the cards led to wildcat action by the mainly female workforce at Heathrow on July 20, causing the cancellation of 500 flights and leaving thousands of air passengers stranded, in some cases for days. The workers were concerned that the cards were aimed at introducing greater flexibility in their work hours, and would lead to them being sent home during "quiet" periods, and having to work

longer at busier times.

The walkout took both BA and the unions by surprise and led to frantic negotiations between them to settle the dispute. BA said the action had cost it more than £30 million, whilst the unions were desperate to regain control of the situation and prove their worth to the company.

It remains to be seen whether their agreement, announced July 30, will satisfy the workforce. According to a statement, the unions have accepted that "a swipe card system is an integral part of improving the efficient use of staff and resources," and have agreed that the cards will be used voluntarily by staff, but will become compulsory on September 1.

Baggage handlers at Newcastle airport ballot for strike

Baggage handlers at Newcastle airport are to ballot on possible strike action, after rejecting a 3 percent pay offer from handling agents Groundstar.

Results of the ballot will be announced on August 11 and could lead to a series of two-day strikes, affecting passengers travelling over the August bank holiday weekend.

Angolan university strike continues

Striking lecturers and non-teaching staff from Agostinho Neto University (UAN) held a demonstration in Luanda, Angola's capital, in support of their six-week-old strike. According to reports in the official media, they are demanding a salary increase backdated to April, medical assistance, improved working conditions, and that Angola adheres to the Arusha convention (the educational standards agreed throughout Africa). No reports of the striking lecturers' views are presented but Angola's Minister of Education, Burity da Silva, is reported denouncing the strikers as "syndicalists".

The Angolan government complains that the trade union demands for monthly salaries of K7,200 (\$US90) for non-technical staff and K17,647 (\$US220) for

teaching personnel amount to more than a 200 percent wage increase and that they have “insufficient budgetary resources” to meet the claims.

In a long statement, the government protests that the strikers’ demands could “cause a chain of claims on the part of the other sectors of the Civil Service” and that financing such salary increases could “only be economically possible through inflationary means, with grave repercussions on the country’s already fragile macro-economy”. Angola is attempting to prove that it is committed to free market policies to win International Monetary Fund (IMF) backing.

Public sector workers on strike in Zambia

Municipal workers in Kabwe, Zambia have been on strike for two weeks demanding a pay increase. In addition nurses, paramedical staff, and other workers in Ndola, Zambia, went on strike last week demanding payment of a 40 percent housing allowance unpaid since April last year. The government had agreed to pay the allowance in February.

In the only report of the Kabwe industrial action, the *Times* of Zambia attacked the dispute, saying it was due to union officials “agitating strikes”. As “the economy of the country is not performing too well at the moment” it was absurd for employees to make “absurd” demands. The *Times* praised Kabwe Municipal Council for its handling of the dispute—agreeing to lift the suspension of five union officials if they called off the stoppage.



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