

# Workers Struggles: Europe, the Middle East & Africa

8 August 2003

## **Italian workers stage strike at US military bases**

Workers at army bases in Italy staged a strike July 25, after the US military decided not to implement a new job classification plan.

Two unions, Unione Italiano Lavoratori and CISL, representing 3,500 workers, organised the four-hour strike. The action shut down Taco Bell for the day at Aviano, where 700 national employees work, said Luisa Merlo, 31st Fighter Wing public affairs specialist.

Lt. Cmdr. Carla McCarthy, spokeswoman for Navy Region Europe, said; “The bases made plans to minimise any impact on services or operations. What you might have seen is a longer waiting time at some facilities.”

The unions said they would strike again for eight hours on September 2 if the issue were not resolved.

The Joint Civilian Personnel Committee, which has a representative from each military branch, signed the plan to redo the job classification system months ago.

The committee requested to meet with the unions to resolve the dispute. Maria Errichiello, a trade union representative and cashier at the Capo Landing food court at Capodichino in Naples, said workers are upset because they are not paid as much as some contract workers, and some jobs traditionally held by Italians are filled by Americans. “It’s terrible. There is a lot of discrimination.”

## **Packing workers in Derbyshire, England strike in pay dispute**

On July 31, workers employed by Amcor Flexibles in Ilkeston, Derbyshire, northern England held a 12-hour strike, the second such action in a week. The 40 staff, members of the General and Municipal Boilermakers (GMB) union held strike action until 1800 BST. Amcor Flexibles produces plastic packaging at the plant.

The union called the strike because it says GMB

members are paid up to 30 percent less than other employees doing comparable work. Staff are currently being balloted on a new pay proposal from the company.

## **UK postal workers ballot for national industrial action**

Postal workers in the UK are currently being balloted for industrial action in a dispute over pay. The 160,000 employees, members of the Communication Workers’ Union, are being balloted following the unions’ rejection of a pay claim. Were a strike to go ahead, it would be the first for seven years.

Royal Mail claims that it has offered a pay deal worth 14.5 percent over 18 months. The CWU has countered that the offer was for just 3 percent from October and a further 1.5 percent next April. There are also a number of conditions attached to the proposed offer, including productivity increases and the loss of 30,000 jobs.

## **Israeli state hospitals face dispute**

The Histadrut labour federation declared an official dispute on July 30 amongst 9,000 administrative, maintenance, and aid staff in 28 state hospitals. After a 14-day “cooling-off period”—required by the Labour Disputes Law—workers will be able to begin a strike or “work to rule”.

Asher Goldshlager, general-secretary of the union of microbiologists and biochemists, said government plans to establish a management company for all the hospitals were responsible for the dispute.

## **South African municipal employees demonstrate over pensions**

Thousands of South African council workers, members of the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union (IMATU), marched through the streets of Pretoria, August 1, to protest over a reduction in pension benefits.

The marchers, including a contingent of white

employees, handed in a document listing their grievances at the offices of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA). It accused SALGA of unilaterally reducing pension benefits and changing the conditions of service of municipal employees, describing the action as “unlawful” and infringing on the constitutional rights of employees. IMATU represents about 73,000 of the country’s 200,000 municipal workers.

### **South Africa diamond miners strike**

Six hundred miners at Rex Mining near Kimberley took strike action after wage negotiations that began in April broke down. They are demanding a 20 percent pay rise and a housing allowance. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) spokesman protested about “The manner in which Rex Mining diamond mine is handling this whole situation”.

A threatened national strike across the entire South African mining sector was called off after talks between the NUM and the mining companies last weekend. The strike would have been the biggest in the mining industry for 16 years. NUM negotiators agreed to accept a Chamber of Mines offer for an across-the-board pay rise of 10 percent—higher than the current inflation rate. They had originally asked for a 20 percent pay rise.

### **Casual workers strike in Uganda**

Workers at Spencon Company Ltd., refurbishing Butabika Hospital, Kampala walked out on August 4 over low pay. Spencon has just been granted a two-year \$10 million contract to carry out the work.

Workers complained that the company is paying them just Shs 1,500 (US 75 cents) a day for casual labour. They are supposed to receive meals but are given no breakfast. One of the workers told the Ugandan *Monitor* newspaper, “We want Spencon to increase our payment to Shs 3,000 a day so that we can feed our families.”

A management spokesman claimed employees could earn Shs 3,000-6,000 a day, depending on their productivity. He claimed drunken workers started the strike, “[But] we shall not chase them away if they come back and resume their duties without causing another strike.”

### **Nearly two million child labourers in Kenya**

A government report investigating child labour in Kenya between 1989 and 1999 found that 1.9 million

children between the age of 5 and 17 were working. The total was made up of 984,000 boys and 910,000 girls. Most of the children (43.6 percent) were in the age range 10 to 14 years and mainly from rural areas. Whilst 76.8 percent of the children had been educated at primary level, only 3.2 percent had attained secondary education and 12.7 percent had not schooling at all.

No figures are provided on the children’s earnings but the report described the vast majority as “grossly underpaid” with their monthly pay falling below the statutory minimum wage set for persons below 18 years. About 48 percent of the children came from households with monthly expenditure of less than Shs 5,000 (\$US66) a month.



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