

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

15 August 2003

French bus drivers strike over heat wave conditions

On August 13, bus drivers employed by CTB in Besancon, eastern France announced one-day strike action over the right to wear shorts and sunglasses during the heat wave, which has seen temperatures top 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit).

The drivers are also demanding air conditioning is fitted in all buses. One driver said, "Driving conditions have become unbearable, the temperatures inside the busses can reach 48 degrees centigrade."

A company spokesman initially ruled out the demands saying that drivers are permitted to drive with the doors open and are given a flask containing a cool drink that they could fill up at the terminal stations.

Hospital workers in Edinburgh, Scotland refuse to work in heat wave

Workers at the new Edinburgh Royal Infirmary hospital in Scotland held a short wildcat strike on August 13, due to the heat wave. Some 40 members of staff took part in the action and demonstrated for 15 minutes outside the £180 million hospital.

Prior to walking off the job the staff had made repeated pleas to management regarding the heat in some parts of the building but nothing had been done.

One of the strikers said, "We cannot work in this. We're suffering from heat exhaustion and everything. We're completely exhausted by it. We want something done now--we can't wait any longer."

The hospital site manager acknowledged the problem and said, "There are a number of areas where there are consistently high temperatures and these require to be further investigated. It has been exacerbated by the temperatures outside in the last few weeks. I appreciate it's a very difficult time for staff who are having to work in difficult conditions, but we are trying to seek solutions."

Trailer factory workers in Wales hold one-day strike

Employees at a trailer manufacturer in Wales held a one-day strike on August 12 in an ongoing dispute over their salaries and working conditions. Just two days before, August 10, more than 150 workers and former employees demonstrated in Cynwyd and marched to Edeyrnion Hall in Corwen.

The strike follows a similar day of action by 200 workers at the plant in June. The company employs 400 staff at its factories in Cynwyd, Bala and Corwen making agricultural trailers and horseboxes.

One of the main grievances of the workers is that they do not receive extra payments for night shifts and that employers have yet to agree on a pay and conditions review for 2003.

Animal charity workers in UK ballot against restructuring

Workers employed by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) charity are to be balloted for strike action in opposition to the organisation's restructuring plans, which will lead to 230 job losses across the UK.

It follows an earlier announcement by the RSPCA that 20 jobs would be cut at its headquarters in Brecon, Wales in September. The base, which houses the central control room that takes calls from across the UK, is to close in February.

The RSPCA wants to save more than £7 million by halving the number of management areas from 10 to 5. It has said it will also cut the number of market inspectors covering livestock sales in Wales from 9 to 2. This would leave the inspection of smaller markets uncovered. The cuts follow heavy losses last year by the RSPCA on its stock market investments.

Crisis for Zambian government as public sector strikes

Zambia's 120,000 public sector workers held a general strike from August 11 to August 13 over the government's failure to honour an agreement on pay rises and housing allowances. Civil Servants Union of

Zambia Secretary-General Darrison Chaala said that “If they don’t act on our demands, we shall go on strike again for a week and if, after a week, the government of President Mwanawasa does not react positively, the strike will be indefinite and operations of the government are bound to suffer greatly.”

The union is responding to widespread anger from workers whose salaries average a mere \$US60 a month. Zambia’s Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, which collects monthly cost of living statistics, estimates that an average family of six needs \$160 a month for basic household items.

After lengthy negotiations with the government, the union agreed in April to drop their original claim for a \$300 across-the-board increase and settled for a salary ranging from \$123 a month for the lowest paid to \$220 a month for the highest.

But the government has been hit by a decision of the International Monetary Fund to hold back \$100 million in aid as a punishment for overrunning its budget by \$123 million. The IMF made a joint statement with Zambia’s Finance Minister demanding that the public sector pay award be reconsidered.

Almost one half of Zambia’s national budget comes from the IMF, the World Bank and bilateral western donors. They have dictated a policy of spending cuts, privatisation, and fighting corruption--the latter resulting in the arrest last week of former President Frederick Chiluba for alleged theft.

Rather than attacking the IMF measures, union leaders and opposition politicians have focused attention on the allegedly expensive vehicles and trips abroad of the present Mwanawasa regime. Opposition members of parliament have now put forward a motion to impeach Mwanawasa for “bad governance.”

South African teachers march over non-payment

Teachers marched through central Durban August 12 in protest at non-payment of salaries. The march, organised by the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), followed an overnight occupation of the KwaZulu-Natal education department's regional office by about 50 unpaid teachers. Whilst some teachers have not been paid at all for up to 14 months, many had not received an 8.5 percent wage increase agreed in April and none had received a one percent pay progression that was supposed to be effective from July.

Representatives from the Education Department criticised the demonstration, claiming that some teachers had submitted their documents late and that payment of the one percent progression had been delayed until the end of August because of “logistical” problems.



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