

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

9 July 2004

Europe

National strike by Italian public transport workers

On July 7, public transport workers held a 24-hour nationwide strike in Italy, causing severe disruption to major cities, including Rome, Milan and Palermo. The strike was held following the failure to agree a pay settlement.

The stoppage was called by the CGIL, CISL and UIL trade unions and involved some 120,000 staff. According to union estimates, participation in the strike stood at 100 percent in Naples, 88 percent in Rome, 63 percent in Milan and 56 percent in Palermo in Sicily.

The strike was not an all-out stoppage because the unions agreed to guarantee a minimum service during rush hours.

Driving-test staff in Northern Ireland continue strike action

On July 2, driving-test centre staff in Northern Ireland struck in a dispute over pay. The employees are members of the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA).

Test centres in Armagh, Craigavon, Lisburn, and Newry were not manned and no testing occurred during the action. The dispute began in May and has so far led to the cancellation of more than 5,700 driving tests. The first strikes in the dispute were held last month at nine centres across Northern Ireland.

The driving-test workers' strike is part of a broader dispute over pay, which began last December. The union has held selective industrial action in protest over the government's policy of refusing to award civil service staff any cost of living increases since April last year. The government has instead imposed a pay deal that will add 3.67 percent to the wage bill of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

That day, as part of the same campaign, NIPSA members at the Department of Environment planning officers in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, began

indefinite selective strike action.

Threatened strike by UK baggage handlers called off

The Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) has called off a strike by up to 3,000 baggage handlers at 17 airports, including Heathrow and Gatwick, after an improved pay offer was put forward by the airport services group, Aviance.

The handlers were set to strike following their rejection of a 2.5 percent pay rise. Staff voted by a margin of four to one in favour of a strike. Baggage handlers and check-in staff are paid an average of just £15-16,000 per annum, according to TGWU.

Aviance eventually offered a rise of just 3.5 percent, equivalent to a maximum £11 a week, and back pay of £250.

The TGWU seized on the offer, with its officer Brendan Gold telling the press, "We will recommend this offer to them so avoiding damaging strike action this summer, which was always our intention."

The Amicus and GMB trade unions were also supposed to ballot their members over industrial action in same dispute.

Hotel workers in Greece threaten to strike Olympic Games

Hotel workers in Athens have threatened to hold industrial action next month during the Olympic Games. The trade union representing workers in the hotel industry held an initial warning strike on May 7. More than 7,000 hotel employees are demanding pay increase and a special Olympic bonus.

Hotel occupancy rates are expected to reach capacity as hundreds of thousands of people visit the city during the Olympic Games, which begin on August 13,

Africa

Namibian fish-processing workers demand changes after supervisor murdered

Employees at NovaNam, one of the biggest fish factories in Namibia, stopped work after the killing of a

supervisor. Andries David Negongo, a worker who had filed grievances last year that had not been attended to, allegedly killed Geralda Eugenia Apollus, 32, on June 25.

Work was stopped late on June 28, as a result of management inaction after the killing. Employees demanded that the company, which is owned by the Spanish multinational Pescanova, follow the usual procedure by suspending the manager they blamed for putting Negongo into a rage.

Namibia Seamen and Allied Workers' Union (NASAWU) president Hango Paulus accused NovaNam of violating an agreement by locking workers out of the factory. "There was no wildcat strike, but [there] was an unlawful lockout... The workers are willing to work," he explained.

Negongo filed two grievances in February and November last year against the head of supervisors, Aletta Gomez. He was said to have believed that he was being victimised and witchhunted. Negongo allegedly became angry when he was served with a suspension notice on June 25, after Apollus had reported him to Gomez for poor work. After the killing, workers demanded that Gomez appear before a disciplinary hearing, for various reasons, including mistreatment of her subordinates. The workers say that management use the supervisors as a buffer, and that labour relations are bad.

Management is believed to have suspended Gomez, but they refused to put up a public notice about it, as had been done previously. The workers demanded that they be informed of the outcome of Gomez's disciplinary hearing. The following day the company locked the workers out. The company also obtained a court order preventing employees from entering the premises and alleging that some of them had intimidated others that wanted to work. Paulus said the union had called in the police to monitor the situation and to prove that no one was being intimidated.

The company has since withdrawn the court order and is said to have promised that the workers' complaints will be addressed.

Nigerian health workers still on strike over arrears

A strike by 2,500 health workers is continuing at Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), in protest over salary arrears that have not been paid for the last

19 months. The strike, involving nurses, pharmacists, laboratory scientists, academic staff and secretaries, began on June 15.

The most important of the strikers' demands is the payment of arrears on a 22-percent allowance due under the Harmonised Tertiary Institution's Salary Structure (HATISS). Staff at LUTH's sister institution, the College of Medicine, University of Lagos (CMUL), are already receiving the payments.

The workers have rejected a plea by the Chief Medical Director, Professor Onatolu Odukoya, to resume work while the government makes good on what he claims is a N40 million (\$US307,000) shortfall in its payments to the hospital. Employees allege that the missing funds, which were meant for the payment of their salaries, have been diverted elsewhere.

Some staff members at the medical school are said to be still providing minimal services to patients, but the risk of an epidemic is increasing as conditions at the hospital deteriorate.



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