

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

16 July 2004

Europe

DaimlerChrysler workers in Germany protest job losses

More than 30,000 DaimlerChrysler staff walked out of Mercedes Benz plants in Germany on July 15. The IG Metall union has stated that the numbers on strike could rise to 80,000.

The company has threatened to shed 6,000-10,000 jobs in Germany and to transfer more production of its C-Class Mercedes model to South Africa if costs are not cut. It wants to reduce annual costs at its Mercedes plants by 500 million euros (\$617.5 million) through lower allowances for extra work, holidays and bonuses.

DaimlerChrysler currently employs about 160,000 people in Germany.

French power workers continue protests as Senate votes to privatise

Workers employed at the state-owned energy group Electricite de France (EdF) have continued their protests against privatisation.

On July 8, workers staged action to coincide with a vote by the French Senate to transform Edf and its sister firm Gaz de France (GdF) into limited liability companies.

The Confederation General du Travail (CGT), which is the majority union in the energy sector, has called most of the protests and demonstrations during the long-running dispute. Other participating unions include Force Ouvrière (FO), Confederation Francaise Démocratique du Travail (CFDT) and Confederation Francaise des Travailleurs Chrétiens (CFTC).

EdF's power stations in Cattenom, Blayais and Chinon were hit by the cuts. During the Senate vote several dozen workers protested at the entrance of the Cattenom nuclear centre for two hours and then halted traffic on the A31 between Thionville and Metz. At Tarbes, power workers kept the tariffs about 30 percent cheaper for that day before reconnecting the current.

The CGT announced that the cuts which amounted to 2,700 megawatts of power would continue until 9.00 p.m. This amounted to a cut of around three percent of EdF's

generation capacity. Workers fear that transforming EdF and GdF into limited liability companies will lead to job losses and attacks on benefits, retirement rights and job security.

Tableware staff at plant in Wrexham, Wales strike

On July 10, workers at a paper tableware firm in Wrexham, Wales, began strike action in a dispute over pay. The strike ended on July 14. The workers are employed by F Bender Ltd and are members of the Transport and General Workers Union. The strike was held following the workers' rejection of a 2.5 percent pay increase.

A union spokesman said that workers had not been given a pay increase for the last two years on the basis of an agreement to provide extra cover for holidays. F Bender Ltd is a leading supplier of paper cups, plates and napkins to customers, including fast food chain MacDonald's.

Russian Bashkiria Airlines workers strike

On July 8, airline workers and pilots at Bashkiria Airlines in Russia struck to demand that their wages be increased and indexed to inflation. The workers have presented a list of 26 demands, including coordination of all company documents with the trade unions.

As a result of the stoppage just one flight was able to depart after the strike began at 8.00 a.m.

Bashkiria Airlines is owned by the federal government and is due to be privatised by the end of 2004.

Africa

Namibian salt workers mount wildcat strike

Salt workers at the Walvis Bay Salt Refiners, Namibia, took wildcat strike action on July 12 to demand a pay increase. They took action in the face of the Mineworkers' Union of Namibia's (MUN) condemnation of the strike as illegal. Around 60 workers downed tools for several hours and blocked the company gate.

MUN Regional Organiser Johannes Kangandjera admitted that salary negotiations, which had been continuing since April, had not been resolved. The union was negotiating for an increase of 15 percent, whereas

management were offering only 7 percent. Kangandjera told the *Namibian* (Windhoek), “The workers said they were tired of the negotiations not being concluded.”

The salt workers held a demonstration in August last year in protest against discrimination and abuse of power by management.

In a parallel development at the nearby Hangan Seafood factory, also in Walvis Bay, fishing workers went on strike on July 9 after finding that backdated increases in salaries and benefits were less than they had expected. One employee said that the workers felt they had been sold out by the Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU).

A “resuscitation” agreement had been signed between the company and the union on April 6, which provided for salary increases and benefits to be backdated to May 2003. The award was in line with the average percentage given to workers at the “non-bargaining unit”.

Speaking on behalf of Hangan, Group Manager for Public Relations, Patrick Hashingola, told the *Namibian* that probably the strikers only realised the agreement was not so favourable when the first payout was made.

The company has applied for and received a court order for the removal of the striking seagoing workers from the premises, on the basis that the strike was “interrupting the company’s daily operation.”

NAFAU vice-president Elias Jonker told the *Namibian* that there was no union involvement in the strike by the 69 workers from three Hangan vessels.

Ghanaian Electoral Commission employees strike for better pay

On July 12, employees of the Ghanaian Electoral Commission (EC) locked all the entrances to the premises and carried out their threat to strike for a 100 percent salary increase. The workers dressed in red and sang war songs during the protest. They shouted, “No provocation, no confrontation”; “EC workers also deserve a fair share of the national cake” and “The kingmakers deserve better remuneration.” Around 20 policemen were deployed in the area.

Elvis Annan, chairman of the EC Division of the Public Services Workers Union (PSWU) of the Trades Union Congress, said that the dispute was over poor salaries for all grades of staff, disregard of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, poor logistics and low morale. “Our action is also to tell the authorities that we are not happy about the undue delay in the payment of our fringe benefits and other entitlements due us.” These include, day trip allowances, special overtime allowances for drivers,

allowances for clothing, vehicle maintenance, tools, and a special overtime rate for out-of-hours electoral exercises.

The strikers temporarily called off the action after three days on condition that they received a letter from Employment and Manpower Development Minister Yaw Barimah confirming a promise he made to resolve their demands over the Ghana Universal Salary Structure by August 1.

Zambia newspaper fires 12 employees

Twelve workers at the *Zambia Daily Mail* were sacked on July 9 for taking strike action. They were part of a group of workers who went on strike on July 7, in support of a demand for an across-the-board wage rise. Management claimed that they were inciting their fellow workers to take action. The dismissal letters were delivered to the strikers by police officers.

Acting chapter president of the Zambia Union of Journalists (ZUJ) at the *Daily Mail*, Mukula Mukula, told the *Post* (Lusaka) that his union had received the news of the sackings “with great shock” and had since appealed to management to rescind its decision.

ZUJ members at the *Ndola Times* condemned the sackings, declaring that the action violated Labour and Industrial Relations Act provisions.

Judge Kabazo Chanda, the chairman of the recently launched Media Council of Zambia (MECOZ), has described the dismissal of the *Daily Mail* employees as too harsh. He said everybody was entitled to ask for more money from his or her employers without intimidation. He pointed out that in the history of the country, there has never been a single legal strike.

Protest of dismissed Nigerian petrol workers

On July 8, police were called to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) headquarters in Abuja, after an early morning protest by 100 casual workers carrying placards protesting lay-offs. They were demonstrating against last week’s dismissal of about 3,000 temporary staff, which they said was inhuman and lacked fairness.

According to *THISDAY* (Lagos), the demonstration “almost put the company into panic, forcing management to quickly arrange dialogue with their representatives.”



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