

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

10 June 2005

## Europe

### French rail workers strike

French rail workers struck on June 2 to protest job losses on the state network and the economic policies of the new government of Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin. The stoppage was held just days after the majority of the French population had voted to reject the proposed European Union constitution.

The strike resulted in widespread disruption to rail travel throughout the country. In the Paris area, more than 50 percent of train services were cancelled. Power and gas workers organised in the CGT trade union are set to strike later this week to demand pay increases and protest against planned privatisations.

### Public sector workers in Belgium march to demand pay increases

Some 4,000 public sector workers marched in the Belgian capital of Brussels on June 2 to demand increased pay. The demonstration was led by the united union front for public workers in French-speaking Wallonia and Brussels.

The demonstration was held following a breakdown in talks between trade union representatives and local authorities the previous evening.

### Construction workers in Finland strike in support of paper workers

Construction workers in Finland walked out this week in sympathy with the Union of Paper Workers, whose members are involved in a lengthy dispute and have been locked out by the Forest Industries Federation.

The June 6 strike was sanctioned by the SAK trade union federation. Other affiliated unions that may take action include the Electrical Workers' Union, the Wood and Allied Workers' Union, the Service Union United and the Chemical Workers' Union. The Metalworkers' Union said this week that it would not

sanction any sympathy action by its members who work in plants alongside the paper workers.

The industrial action follows the paper workers' rejection of a proposal by the state labour mediator, Juhani Salenius. According to press reports, the employers were prepared to accept the deal. Further talks between the paper workers' union and management are scheduled for next week.

### Train guards and conductors at British train company strike

Train guards and conductors employed by the UK train operating company One struck on June 6. The members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union are involved in an ongoing dispute with One over the use of new mobile ticketing machines.

One provides train services to London's Liverpool Street station and the east of England, and the strike resulted in a restricted service affecting branch lines out of Norwich. Some routes out of Ipswich were closed altogether.

Further industrial action is planned for June 27 and July 15 pending the resolution of the dispute.

### Postal workers in Northern Ireland strike in overtime dispute

On June 7, postal workers in Belfast, Northern Ireland, took unofficial strike action in an overtime dispute. A total of 250 workers participated in the action, according to Royal Mail management. The strike disrupted mail services throughout Belfast.

## Middle East

### Israeli armament workers protest over non-payment of wages

Hundreds of workers at Israel Military Industries (TAAS) blocked the entrance to the TAAS Magen plant near Tel Aviv on June 6, after being told they would not be paid this month. The protesting workers used tanks, armoured cars, and missile launchers to seal the

entrance, creating a gridlock along a nearby highway.

The TAAS employee union head, Yitzhak Yehuda, said Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was scheduled to meet next week with Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz to discuss TAAS's budget problems. He added, "We are talking about a meeting that was postponed again and again. Mofaz and Netanyahu need to talk about transferring funds that would save the company. After the meeting was postponed again we realised we have to initiate a struggle."

## **Africa**

### **Kenyan civil servants face mass sackings after strike ends**

The Union of Kenya Civil Servants (UKCS) ordered its members to end their national strike on June 7. The strike was called in order to win a 600 percent pay claim.

The government responded by sacking 9,000 strikers and advertising for replacements. Labour Minister Newton Kulundu gave orders to civil service managers to lock out anyone not reporting for work on June 9 and 10, according to the Nation. The Health Ministry has already recruited 400 nurses and other professional staff to replace the striking health workers.

Riot police moved in to break up demonstrations by the strikers and their supporters in several Kenyan towns.

The government planned to cut 21,000 civil servant jobs before the strike began in order to reduce the country's public sector salary bill in accordance with International Monetary Fund demands. The IMF began allowing credit and aid to Kenya last year, but only if the civil service was slashed in size.

### **Graduate teachers on strike in Ghana**

The strike by members of the National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT) in Ghana continues. Professional teachers currently undertaking degree courses at the University of Ghana welcomed the strike. They were angry that the government had ignored their concerns.

The Minister of Education, Yaw Osafo Marfo, is proposing to use retired teachers and clerics to act as monitors in the forthcoming examinations.

### **Rail workers, tyre manufacturing workers strike in South Africa**

Rail workers went on strike in Cape Town on June 6 to back a 6.5 percent pay claim. Metrorail is offering

4.5 percent. Daily life in Cape Town was affected by the walkout as staff failed to arrive at the departments of sewerage treatment, water and cleansing.

Also in South Africa, more than 300 workers launched a wildcat strike against Continental Tyres in Sidwell, Port Elizabeth, on June 7. The protest was in opposition to the ending of the weekend shift and rescheduling the hours into the weekday shifts. The strikers burnt tyres outside the company's premises.



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