

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

2 September 2005

Gate Gourmet UK refuses to reinstate hundreds of sacked workers

On August 30, Gate Gourmet Chairman David Siegel stated that the company will not re-employ what he described as “militants” and “radicals,” following the sacking of more than 600 of its employees on August 10. The mass sackings led to sympathy action by 1,000 British Airways ground staff and the halting of all BA flights at Heathrow Airport for more than 24 hours.

Last week, the company and the Transport & General Workers Union agreed on a deal that will lead to the loss of 675 jobs through a “voluntary redundancy package.”

Siegel revealed in an interview with the *Daily Telegraph* that the company has targeted several hundred such workers it will not reinstate. He said, “The radicals have to realise there is no place for them in the company any more. This is the company’s final position: we will not take these militants, these radicals, back. They have been the source of the core problem for the company, they have been holding the company hostage.

“There are at least a couple of hundred of employees who are either militant or part of the problem. We need 675 redundancies, but if 675 of our best employees say ‘I’ve have enough, just pay me some money and I will move on,’ we would not accept that. What we want is the employees who have self-selected themselves out with their bad behaviour to say ‘I no longer work for the company; I have no rights, the company is offering an incredibly generous package to move on and my choice is nothing or a generous package.’ “

Siegel’s statements confirm the treacherous character of the agreement signed by the TGWU. Not only has it done everything it could to end the strike and isolate its members. It has now paved the way for the victimisation of militant workers who defied the

union’s policy of collaboration with management.

Coal miners in Russia begin underground protest

On August 30, 13 coal miners began an underground protest at the Shakhtyorsk mine in the Sakhalin region of Russia. They were joined the following day by a further 7 miners. The miners are demanding 34 million rubles in wages unpaid since 2002.

Nikolai Ovchinnikov, chairman of the mine’s union committee, said, “Miners underground have no food. At a meeting today, mine workers declared their moral support to their comrades, participants in the action of protest. Miners are ready to go on hunger strike. Already now, they have nothing except water.” A total of 428 miners are employed at the loss-making coalmine.

UK Eurostar Channel Tunnel security staff strike

UK Eurostar Channel Tunnel security guards took industrial action on August 26 and 27 in a pay dispute. The workers are members of the Rail Maritime and Transport trade union employed by the security firm Chubb and are based at the Ashford and Waterloo Eurostar stations.

Workers struck for three and a half hours on each day of the action. Security guards at Ashford International station in Kent struck on the morning of August 26 and the following morning. The workers at London’s Waterloo took strike action during the afternoon of August 26 and the following morning. The strike went ahead following a breakdown in negotiations between the union and management.

Firefighters in Suffolk, England, strike over job losses

Firefighters in the county of Suffolk held a two-hour strike on August 31 in a dispute over the loss of 12 jobs. The redundancies eliminate front-line jobs at the fire station in the town of Bury St. Edmunds.

The strikes are part of a series of seven two-hour

walkouts over the next seven days that are to be held at different times each day. During the action, the firefighters will not respond to emergency calls.

Postal staff in Bristol strike in overtime dispute

On August 29, postal workers in Bristol took strike action in an ongoing dispute over contractual overtime. The members of the Communication Workers' Union work at Easton's Royal Mail depot. The strikes have disrupted deliveries and collections in the Easton, Fishponds and Lawrence Hill areas of the city. Postal workers also took industrial action on August 15 and 26. During the stoppages, Royal Mail drafted in managers in an attempt to weaken the strike.

Jordanian dockworkers threaten strike

Around 700 dockworkers at a Jordanian container terminal gave their employers a 28-day ultimatum on August 15 to begin negotiations over their demand or face industrial action. Members of the Jordanian ITF-affiliate, the General Union of Port Workers, will begin strike action at the Aqaba container terminal when the 28-day period expires unless their demands are met.

The dockers are protesting over the dismissive attitude of Danish-run APM, which took over the management of the terminal last year from the port authority following privatisation, to the union's requests for negotiation. The workers also say that the company is undermining employment conditions by sacking workers, banning overtime, and pushing through cancellation of housing benefits once received by port authority employees.

Africa

Ghanaian gold miners stage wildcat strike

Workers at Gold Fields Ltd., the fourth-largest producer of gold in the world, held a wildcat strike that started on August 28. The strike took place at the Tarkwa mine in Ghana, which is Gold Fields' biggest and most profitable mine outside of South Africa, where it is based. The workers set up roadblocks at two entrances to the mine.

The strike was held in spite of the Ghana Mineworkers Union, which had completed a wage deal with management two days earlier. The workers had been demanding a yearly bonus of at least 45m cedi (US\$5,000) each, but after three weeks of negotiations the union settled for 6.8m cedi (US\$750). The bonus will be taxed at a rate of 21 percent, meaning that the real increase would be 5.3m cedi (US\$593).

The anger of the workforce was inflamed when they discovered that management had donated US\$3 million in sponsorship money to Ghana's top soccer team.

Other demands of the strikers include an increase in the minimum basic salary from US\$173 to US\$350 a month and an increase in the housing subsidy.

Three thousand retail workers on strike in South Africa

Around 3,000 retail workers at Metcash Africa Trading in South Africa have been on strike for two weeks in protest against 644 workers being made redundant.

The strikers are members of the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union, which is asking that 40 percent of those losing their jobs be reinstated. The union is also seeking a renewed role for the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration in settling the dispute.



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