

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

7 October 2005

Europe

Metalworkers in Italy hold nationwide strike

Metalworkers in Italy held a nationwide strike on September 30 to demand an increase in pay. The workers are calling for a salary increase of €130 (US\$156) per month. The strike is the latest action in an ongoing dispute between metalworkers and the employers' association Federmeccanica dating from January. Metalworkers previously struck for 12 hours in pursuit of their demands.

Thousands of workers participated in demonstrations and protests in many towns and cities including Milan, Naples, Reggio Emilia, L'Aquila, Torino, Vicenza and Taranto.

The employers' association has offered a pay increase of €60 (US\$72) per month, with a conditional clause allowing them to decide on working time flexibility without further negotiation.

Hospital staff in Belgium strike

Staff at hospitals in Brussels began a campaign of industrial action on October 3 in protest at management's refusal to consider some of their demands regarding working conditions.

Hospitals affected by the strikes included the Saint-Pierre, Bordet, Reine Fabiola, Brugmann, Paul Rien, Magritte and the Iris-Su. At the Iris-Su all categories of health staff were involved in the industrial action with the exception of doctors.

Semiconductor factory workers in Germany strike

Staff employed by the German semiconductors manufacturing company Infineon held a "warning strike" on September 30 to protest plans to close a factory in Munich-Perlach. The workers are members of the IG Metall trade union. The union reported that some 160 employees took part in the industrial action.

The company announced in February that it would close the plant by 2007, as part of a restructuring strategy. Its closure will result in most of the 800 workers being made redundant, the dismantling of the factory and the transfer of part of the production facilities to another site in Regensburg. Infineon stated last week the costs associated

with this were less than those required to modernise the factory.

According to Infineon, last month rival chip maker X-Fab decided not to purchase the ageing Munich-Perlach plant on the basis that its economic and structural deficits were "insurmountable."

Tanker drivers in Scotland take industrial action in pay dispute

On September 30, more than 20 tanker drivers in the north of Scotland began a four-day strike over pay. The strikers are members of the Transport and General Workers Union. During the industrial action the drivers established a picket line in Aberdeen and protested at depots in Mintlaw, Elgin and Inverness.

The workers are employed by Gleaner Fuels, a company delivering exclusively for Shell UK. The drivers also deliver supplies to petrol stations as well as domestic and commercial users throughout Grampian, the Highlands, Argyll and Bute and remote areas such as the Western Isles.

Africa

South African unions call first of weekly one-day strikes

The first in a series of one-day strikes called by the South African Confederation of Trade Unions (COSATU) brought industries in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces to a halt on October 3.

The strike was in opposition to high unemployment and job losses. It is the first of a series of protests to be held each Monday in October with longer periods of strike action threatened in different sectors.

Some 35,000 workers marched through central Cape Town to the gates of parliament to protest job losses and poverty. COSATU said the turnout was 60 percent of their membership in the Eastern Cape. Two-thirds of the workers at the Ford Motor Company were on strike, and DaimlerChrysler in East London closed down for the day. Other car manufacturers, including General Motors and Volkswagen, were also affected, though not as severely.

Official unemployment stands at 26 percent, double the

figure of 10 years ago. If those who no longer bother to seek work because of the lack of prospects are included, the figure is 41 percent. Some 55,000 jobs were lost in the clothing industry alone in the last two years through closures and liquidations.

The response to the one-day strike reflects growing anger amongst working people in South Africa at the ANC government's free-market policies, despite the repeated efforts of COSATU to limit protest action. COSATU leaders employ demagoguery designed to head off a serious political movement against the ANC, which they continue to loyally support in an alliance with the South African Communist Party.

COSATU's demands have taken an increasingly chauvinist character, directed particularly against cheap imports from China. They are demanding that businesses support local industries, and that retailers purchase 75 percent of their stock locally.

Strikers fired and arrested in Djibouti

Eleven trade union leaders and around 165 strikers have been dismissed from their jobs and arrested at the international port of Djibouti, according to a press release by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).

Following a four-day general strike from September 14, the police prevented 11 leaders from the Port Workers' Union (UTP) from entering the port, and confiscated their access cards. The port management told them they had been dismissed for "impeding the freedom to work" during the general strike. In protest, the port workers called a second strike on September 24. Within two hours of their decision, 110 strikers had been arrested by the national police force (FNP) and taken to a detention centre.

By September 26, nearly 160 people had been arrested and were being detained. Six of the eleven union leaders were being interrogated in a police station. The ICFTU reported that the repression was still continuing on September 28.



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