Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

30 December 2005

Europe

Staff strike magistrates courts in England and Wales

Thousands of staff in magistrates' courts across England and Wales staged a 24-hour strike on December 20. The action by around 6,000 staff was the first such strike in the 800-year history of magistrates' courts in England and Wales. The workers, including ushers, legal clerks and administration staff, are in dispute with their employers over pay.

The action resulted in many courts closing for the day and cases being adjourned. Government figures revealed that 33 courthouses out of 350 in England and Wales closed for the day. The members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) are opposed to a 2.2 percent pay increase offer. The strike was called following a strike ballot in which 80 percent of the 7,800 magistrates' courts staff endorsed industrial action. One hundred twenty members of the white collar Prospect trade union, who are senior legal advisers in magistrates' courts, also voted for strike action.

The Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) claimed that the average pay deal was worth 3.7 percent. However, the PCS disputed these claims and said that this figure includes a pay deal already offered to junior staff in April 2004 and in effect amounts to an increase in pay scales of just 2.2 percent.

The union said the strike stemmed from the failure to properly fund the cost of establishing Her Majesty's Court Service (HMCS). In April magistrates' court staff were transferred to the Civil Service to create the new combined agency which runs magistrates, crown and county courts. Court staff are amongst the lowest-paid civil servants.

Public sector employees state industrial action in Croatia

On December 28, public sector employees in Croatia struck for 24 hours to demand an increase in pay. According to trade unions, up to 90 percent of their members participated in the action.

Following negotiations with the trade unions, the government has refused to raise the pay of state employees by an additional 300 kuna (US$48) a month. It has instead offered a pay increase of 3 percent to be paid in 2006.

The unions have produced statistics on pay that show that a state employee can only earn up to 3,100 kuna (US$495) a month—the equivalent of 60 percent of the average monthly salary in Croatia.

London Underground staff set to strike on New Years Eve

London Underground (LU) workers are set to strike on New Year's Eve following the breakdown of informal talks between the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) trade union and management on December 28. The RMT and London Underground management are to hold further negotiations with the conciliation service ACAS later this week.

Talks have been ongoing since before Christmas in an attempt to resolve the dispute over new rosters, staffing levels and safety.

Some 4,000 underground workers are scheduled to walk off the job for 24-hours at midday on December 31. RMT members voted by more than five to one in favour of a strike.

The RMT said that the industrial action would proceed "over the company's refusal to withdraw unsafe rosters and mass staff displacements imposed without agreement." The union said that the new roster would result in "back-door staff cuts" and could jeopardise safety on the London Underground network.

Management at London Underground plan to close ticket offices and keep stations open around the clock as part of a restructuring of the Tube. LU claims the rosters had already been agreed by the RMT.

Africa

Woolworth workers in South Africa stay out on

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strike

Employees of Woolworth's department store in South Africa have stayed out on strike over Christmas, in a six-week dispute over wages and overtime rates.

The South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) has reduced its demand for a wage increase from R290 to R260 (from US$45.65 to US$41). Another demand is that Sunday and holiday shifts be made voluntary, and that they are paid at double the normal rate.

Truckers in Cameroon to go on strike

The Cameroon National Truckers Union (SNTRC) has declared its intention to begin an open-ended strike from December 26, in protest at high taxes—especially Value Added Tax (VAT) and road tax.

Over 15,000 drivers and over 10,000 assistants are employed in the sector.

Nigerian hospital strike

Doctors at Lagos State University Teaching Hospital have gone on strike after an agreement with management broke down. The doctors were promised that they would receive their unpaid allowances.

Dr. Olaifa, a representative of the striking doctors, told the press, "In view of the discrepancy between what the management is saying and what was agreed upon by the workers we have no option but to call our colleagues to begin a strike immediately because it is obvious management is trying to play a smart one on us."

The hospital's chief medical officer, Dr. Femi Olugbile, warned that any doctor who did not turn up for work would be regarded as having committed an "illegality."

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