

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

6 January 2006

Europe

Staff at Disneyland in Paris protest long hours

On December 29, hundreds of workers employed at Disneyland in Paris protested a management decision to not pay staff a bonus for 2005 and over being forced to work long hours. The protest was called by several trade unions.

Many of those participating held banners and chanted slogans. A flyer handed out by staff during the day accused management of “stinginess” for not paying the majority of employees a €100 (US\$119) bonus this year.

It read in part, “Management at Disneyland Resort Paris is giving huge payments to its managers and refusing to grant 100 euros to its employees. Such pettiness and stinginess!”

Some 7,000 employees out of Euro Disney’s staff of more than 12,000 did not receive a bonus for 2005. A spokesman for Disney said that bonuses were only paid if Disneyland, Paris reported a profit for the year. Euro Disney posted a €95 million (US\$113 million) net loss in its 2005 fiscal year.

Staff at UK rail firm strike in pay dispute

On January 1, 300 workers employed by the UK rail firm Virgin Cross Country struck in a dispute over pay. The strike began at midnight on New Year’s Day.

The workers are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT). The union stated that the introduction of a 35-hour week has led to its members losing money. It added that Sunday pay rates have also been cut by nearly 6 percent in the process.

The company said that the strike did not have a widespread impact, and that it managed to run 91 of its 123 planned rail services. The firm employed office managers on some of its trains during the strike action. The union said that if the dispute cannot be resolved, “they face the prospect of our members stopping work every Sunday.”

English National Opera workers vote to strike

Employees at the English National Opera (ENO) voted to strike to demand pay increases last week. On December 28, the broadcasting union Bectu announced that 94 percent of its members had voted in favour of industrial action. The union has called for a 5 percent pay increase. Its members rejected a company pay offer of 2.77 percent.

Opera staff in technical, managerial and administrative departments affected by the dispute are to participate in the stoppage. The union has yet to announce any strike date.

The union said that industrial action was the last resort and called for the company to “unite the organisation.” Bectu Assistant General Secretary Gerry Morrissey said, “The ballot result indicates the level of dissatisfaction the staff have with the board. Instead of uniting the organisation after the recent departure of the chairman and chief executive they have chosen confrontation with the union over pay.”

Africa

Nigerian doctors sacked for going on strike

Resident doctors at the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH), Ikeja, who began an all-out strike on December 28 were sacked two days later by the government for taking what it claimed was illegal action.

The government threatened to replace all the sacked doctors with new ones who would be screened on January 3. In the meantime, other doctors were drafted in from satellite hospitals to take the place of the striking doctors.

Health Commissioner Dr. Leke Pitan told a press conference that the government had decided to sack all the striking resident doctors who had refused to return to their duty posts by 10 a.m., Friday, December 30. He said, “While it is not a combat situation, this administration would not sit back and watch any group of workers hold up the reins of government for selfish reasons.”

Quoting from the doctors' terms of employment, he insisted that their appointment was subject to annual renewal for a maximum period of five years. But the doctors' representative, Dr Ibrahim Olaifa, told the *Saturday Independent*, "The portion which is been referred to has been under contention since last July. Doctors were made to sign the letters under extraneous circumstances and it is still a subject of contention, which cannot be held onto. Nevertheless, we remain unshaken by the threats."

Ugandan postgraduate students take strike action

Postgraduate students at Mulago Hospital have been on strike for almost two weeks in support of their demand for the payment of allowances. The students had been promised allowances of sh400,000 (US\$220) in payment for the services they provided at the hospital.

Health Minister Major General Jim Muhwezi has promised that the allowances will be paid in full, but the students have vowed they will not to return to work without a formal communication from the minister.

Muhwezi told *The New Vision* that he was not aware that the students were not receiving any allowance. He appealed to the strikers to end their action, which had partly paralysed work at the hospital.

South African warehouse workers' strike enters seventh week

The strike by 470 workers employed by the Woolworth's supermarket supplier, Universal Product Networks (UNP), has entered its seventh week. The action began over the workers' demand for an increase of 10.7 percent in the minimum wage, which currently stands at R3,268 (US\$483) and increased premiums for working Saturday and Sunday. They also insist that working weekends should be voluntary. The action has hit five UNP depots in Johannesburg, Durban and the Western Cape.

Since the action began, the strikers' union, the South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union, has reduced the wage demand by 10 percent

A picket was held outside the Woolworth's branch in the centre of Johannesburg over the Christmas period. Phanuel Machoga, one of the pickets, told *Business Day* that his family faced a bleak Christmas and New Year. Another striker, Nomsa Mooki, said, "There are no Christmas goodies for my children this year. But at least they will have food to eat."

Zwelinzima Viva, general secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions, has written to Woolworth's head office asking the company to intervene in the strike.



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