

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

4 March 2006

## **German autoworkers strike in dispute over pay and productivity**

On March 4, workers employed by DaimlerChrysler in the state of Baden-Württemberg in southwest Germany took strike action in a dispute over pay, working hours and productivity.

The 1,000 workers, members of the IG Metall trade union, walked off the job for several hours in a “warning strike.” The union is calling for a 5 percent increase in wages and guarantees on working hours, including the maintenance of traditional toilet breaks.

Other auto and auto parts manufacturers such as Porsche and Bosch are expected to be targeted for strike action pending the resolution of the DaimlerChrysler dispute.

## **Power workers in England take unofficial action in defence of Hungarian colleagues**

Engineers, electricians and welders employed at Cottam power station near Lincoln, England went out on a wildcat strike last week to protest the underpayment of Hungarian workers employed on a desulphurisation project at the plant. It is claimed that the staff had been underpaid £1 million by Austrian subcontractor SFL.

The dispute began when the construction firm told workers not to discuss their wages and conditions with other employees at the plant. However, it soon became known that the Hungarian workers had worse conditions than the British staff.

The Hungarian workers then began to join the General and Municipal Boilermakers (GMB) trade union, but as they did they were then transferred to other jobs in continental Europe. One of the workers paid for a flight back to the UK to explain to the British workers that the Hungarians were being victimised. Upon hearing this news, 19 British construction staff immediately walked out, and were then joined by

scaffolders and ladders.

The GMB and Amicus trade unions denounced the strike action on the grounds that workers did not conduct an official ballot.

## **Railway drivers in Dublin take unofficial action strike**

Drivers employed on Dublin’s DART rail network began an unofficial strike on February 27 in a dispute over the imposition of new rosters. During the strike, six train services were cancelled. The action involved members of the NBRU and SIPTU unions.

The NBRU said that the strike was over changes to rosters which were introduced by management without agreed consultation.

## **Public sector employees in Croatia hold three-day strike**

Public sector workers in Croatia began industrial action on February 25. Workers are demanding an increase in pay.

The strike was joined by customs officers, leading to delays in international transport services. Other workers who participated in the strike included employees of the Ministry of the Interior and staff at tax offices and the courts.

## **Iranian bus drivers protest outside Labour Ministry**

Around 150 bus drivers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (Sherkat e Vahed) gathered outside the offices of the Labour Ministry in East Tehran February 22, demanding to return to their jobs.

Hundreds of bus workers have been laid off following strike action on January 28, in which up to 1,300 workers were arrested. In the ensuing crackdown against the striking workers, considerable force and intimidation were employed. Most of those detained have now been released, following international protests, culminating in a “world day of action” on

February 15.

At least six union activists, including union leader Mansoor Ossanlou, remain in prison. This week, for the first time, the judge handling the cases of the detained workers allowed the families of Ya'ghoub Salimi, Ebrahim Nozari Gohari and Mansoor Hayat Gheibi to visit them in Evin Prison.

The bus workers and their families have vowed to continue their protest until the release of their jailed colleagues, reinstatement of all laid-off workers, recognition of their union and the meeting of their other demands.

The 17,000 employees of the state-owned Vahed bus company have been in a dispute with management and the authorities since last year over the recognition of their union and the introduction of collective bargaining.

### **Five-day general strike in Guinea**

Workers in Guinea, West Africa, began a five-day general strike on February 27 after talks between the unions and government broke down. The capital Conakry and the main port that handles exports were brought to a standstill.

Anger has grown over low wages in the public sector, unpaid arrears and the spiralling cost of living. The majority of Guineans live on less than \$1 per day. The cost of rice, the staple food for most Guineans, nearly doubled between January 2004 and November 2005. Petrol prices have also increased markedly in the past few months.

The main demand of the strikers is for a fourfold increase in wages, but the government has rejected this demand.

Troops were visible at all the major junctions of Conakry from the start of the strike. The present government installed itself in power through a military coup in 1984, and relies on the use of force to maintain its rule.

Guinea has almost one third of the global reserves of bauxite, the raw material used to make aluminium.

### **Junior workers at three hospitals in Malawi go on strike**

A strike that began at Mzuzu Central Hospital in Malawi on February 27 has spread to at least two other hospitals, as junior workers protest against preferential treatment being given to the professional staff.

David Manjawira, a member of staff at Zomba

Central Hospital, told Kenya's *The Nation*, "We are not saying we should receive similar salaries but that the percentage should be uniform because our duties complement each other."

While some nurses got a 100 percent increase, most of the junior workers received a salary increase of only 7 to 12 percent.

The government countered that the money used to pay for the raises for professional staff came from donors, who had specified how the donated money was to be spent.

### **Teachers on strike in Sierra Leone**

Teachers at the Cardinal Educational Center in Freetown went on strike at the end of February. According to a report in the *Concord Times* (based in Freetown), the teachers should have been paid for performing exams and marking the completed papers, but have received no payment.

One teacher said that when they complained to the owner of the center, Kenneth Newman-Smart in London, they were answered with insults and threats that teachers would be replaced if they went on strike.

### **Airline workers strike in South Africa**

Over 300 airline workers employed by Nationwide Airlines in Durban and Johannesburg went on strike on February 23. The strikers are members of the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (Satawu), which has accused the airline of dividing workers on racial grounds and refusing to negotiate with the union.



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