

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

29 April 2006

## **UK Peugeot workers consider strike action**

Union leaders threatened on April 19 to take industrial action after a decision by the French car giant PSA Peugeot Citroen to close its Ryton plant near Coventry with the loss of 2,300 jobs. A show of hands at a mass meeting indicated support for industrial action, but none has so far been set.

Peugeot, which is moving production to Slovakia, has been hit by weak sales in its main markets in Western Europe. The group said that the plant was to close because its distance from suppliers on the European mainland meant its costs were higher than those of any other plant in the PSA group. But union officials accused him of reneging on a commitment given a year ago to consult with unions before any move was taken.

The decision to close Ryton follows last year's closure of MG Rover, which cost 5,000 jobs.

## **Irish lecturers threaten strikes**

College lecturers may go on strike across the Republic of Ireland if Education Minister Mary Hanafin removes the job security currently available to them when she legislates for changed third-level funding structures later this year.

A bill, currently being prepared by the minister, would move the institutes of technology under the direct funding and governance of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) along with the universities.

Under existing legislation governing the institutes, staff have the right to a sworn public inquiry before being dismissed. But it is feared that this protection will not be available to those employed after the act is passed.

## **Workers strike at Irish turbine firm in pension scheme row**

About 180 workers at a turbine plant in Cork, Ireland went on strike April 21 in response to the company's plans to restructure their pensions. The industrial action

at the firm, which specialises in maintaining and repairing turbines for the aircraft industry, started at 4 p.m. when workers turned up for the nightshift. SIFCO Ireland employs about 250 people. Pickets were placed at the company's two plants in Cork. The company recently decided to sell off part of its operations, raising concerns that the new owners will change the existing pension scheme from one with guaranteed payouts to one dependent upon stock market returns.

## **Industrial action looms at Irish Sugar**

Workers at Irish Sugar voted on April 20 by an overwhelming majority in favour of industrial action, following the breakdown of negotiations on redundancy terms.

When talks broke down all offers were withdrawn by management. The issue was then referred to the Labour Court to await a recommendation, but time is running out if an agreement is to be reached before the planned closure date on May 12.

## **Workers in Bahrain strike for compensation**

Almost 2000 workers in Manama, Bahrain, refused to work in protest against poor living conditions and pay structure on April 19.

A total of 1,489 Indians, 218 Pakistanis, 109 Filipinos, 97 Nepalis and four Bangladeshis, working for the Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC), a subcontractor working on a project for the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO), protested against poor living conditions and the lack of "risk allowance" for working in a "high-risk environment."

The workers presented a list of 13 demands to the management when they began their protests on Monday. Officials from four embassies—India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Bangladesh—have reportedly left the company's labour camp without striking any deal between the workers and the company's management.

The embassy officials said that the CCC management

had agreed to a 5 percent salary increase, overtime and improvement of lodgings and facilities, among others, but the workers wanted the company to meet all their demands.

The dispute began when one of the employees, Indian national Asghar Ali, refused to be moved to another work site in Qatar.

Among the more serious issues the workers have raised is that when a worker completes his contract and wants to return, the company asks for a payment towards “costs” and the worker has to pay for his own ticket. This becomes a financial burden on every worker and it also violates the Bahrain Labour Law, the workers say.

### **UAE workers demand unpaid wages**

Hundreds of angry workers of Mattar Rashid Al Jabri Contracting company in Al Aweer in the United Arab Emirates continued their protest for the fifth day on April 17, demanding unpaid wage arrears. The protesters also lodged a formal complaint with the Ministry of Labour.

According to the protesting workers, the company has not paid their salaries for the past five months. The strikers say they are concerned the company manager has left the country and they will never be paid their arrears.

### **Health workers in Ghana take strike action**

Health workers in Ghana, including nurses and paramedics, took strike action on April 20 in opposition to the National Labour Commission’s (NLC) proposal to implement new salary levels.

The new pay levels were calculated following a job evaluation exercise carried out by a British consulting firm, Cedar Care Trust International. The workers said the implementation was in contravention to the Labour Act of 2003, which allows for negotiation.

The strikers returned to work on April 24 after the government health minister promised to look into the matter.

### **Nigerian lecturers stage warning strike**

University lecturers, members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), began a three-day “warning” strike April 24, with the threat of further full-scale strike action next week at the six universities in the Nsukka zone of the union. The action follows the failure of the government to agree to renegotiation of the 2001 agreement, which has been outstanding since

June 2004.

The union was also protesting the sacking of 49 lecturers at the University of Ilorin. Newspaper reports have said three of the sacked lecturers have died as a result of their deteriorating personal conditions following their sacking.

### **South African Telkom workers continue strike**

Workers belonging to the Communication Workers Union (CWU) at South Africa’s Telkom are continuing their strike for wage increases of up to 8 percent.

Members of the CWU number around 15,000 out of the total workforce of 26,000. A picket has been mounted outside the company’s national network operation centre in Centurion near Pretoria.

CWU officials and Telkom representatives met on April 24 and a new offer was presented. No details are currently available.



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