

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

5 May 2006

## Europe

### **Thousands of civil servants in the UK strike to protest job losses**

On May 2, up to 90,000 civil servants working in job centres, benefit offices and the Child Support Agency staged a 48-hour strike to protest job cuts. The action began following a breakdown in talks between the Public and Commercial Services Union and the Department of Work and Pensions, which plans to cut 30,000 civil servants jobs.

At least 15,000 of these planned job losses have already been carried through since the cuts were first implemented two years ago. The Public and Commercial Services Union have called for an “independent assessment” into the loss of the 15,000 jobs. According to the union more than 60 DWP staff are losing their jobs every month after being off work sick.

### **Peugeot auto workers demonstrate against factory closure**

On April 29, a delegation of trade union members employed at the Peugeot auto plant in Ryton near Coventry, England demonstrated against the factory’s closure in the nearby city of Birmingham. The previous day workers staged a protest outside a Coventry Peugeot dealership.

Peugeot plans to close the plant in July next year with the loss of 2,300 jobs. But unions at the plant, which include the Transport and General Workers Union, are opposed to any struggle against job losses on the basis of uniting workers in a common struggle against the auto company both in Britain and abroad. Instead, they have presented a proposal to Peugeot for a single production shift to be implemented at Ryton this summer as a means of reducing production and scaling down the workforce.

### **Italy: Public transport workers stage industrial action**

Public transport workers held national strike action in

Italy on April 28. In the capital Rome, the industrial action halted 75 percent of overground public transport. According to reports the underground system stopped completely. Regional train services including Rome-Lido, Rome-Pantano and Rome-Viterbo also ground to a halt. The lack of public transport led to a build-up of road traffic with many of the main roads and throughways blocked, particularly during the morning rush hour.

## Africa

### **South African security guards still on strike**

South African security guards belonging to South African Transport and Allied Workers’ Union (Satawu) have been on strike since April 9. The strike began after 14 other unions signed a deal with the employers’ organisation on April 1 for an increase of 8.3 percent. Satawu declared the settlement to be totally inadequate and is demanding 11 percent.

Tensions have been building up during the course of the dispute. According to *Cape Times*, a May Day rally organised by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) had to be called off when proceedings were interrupted by hundreds of Satawu strikers. A speaker from the National Congress of Trade Unions (Nactu) was chased off the stage and *Cape Times* reported, “Cosatu leaders scurried around and could be heard calling for the police to be summoned to intervene.” As the strikers marched away from the rally they were attacked by police using rubber bullets, stun grenades and tear gas.

One striker, Nancy Tukela, told *Cape Times*, “We can’t stop until we get that 11 percent. Mdladlana [Labour Minister] said the police must beat us, shoot us, whatever, but this is a free country and we must keep doing what we need to do to protect ourselves.”

### **Health workers strike continues in Ghana**

Nurses and paramedics in Ghana, who have been on strike since April 20, have refused to follow their leaders’ call for a return to work. The strikers have

expressed their disapproval of the agreement made between the Ghana Registered Nurses Association (GRNA) and the government on their conditions of service, saying that it failed to address their grievances. They have said they will continue their action.

### **Cameroonian tea workers on strike for over two months**

Workers at the Cameroon Tea Estate, CTE, in Tole, Buea, have been in dispute for over two months protesting against a 50 percent cut in their wages and demanding the payment of benefit entitlements.

On April 12, Labour and Social Security Minister, Robert Nkili promised that all their dues would be paid in three months. The workers are determined that nothing will leave the factory until their problems are solved. On April 23 they successfully halted a military truck that was being used to carry tea out of the factory.

According to an interview with one of the strikers in Buea's the *Post*, "The crowd, numbering about 300, defied warning shots and deflated the tyres of the truck. Its windshield was shattered, including the headlamps." After negotiations with an army colonel the truck was removed from the factory premises.



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