

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

2 June 2006

## Europe

### **Bulgarian workers protest against government**

On May 30 up to 15,000 Bulgarian workers participated in a demonstration in the capital Sofia to protest the government's economic policies and declining living standards.

Workers also demanded the right to strike and demonstrated to defend the rights of civil servants. Many delegations attended the rally, including miners, health and transport staff and teachers. The rally began at Macedonia Square and much of the capital was brought to a halt by a march past government headquarters.

The National Statistical Institute found that the average monthly income of a Bulgarian family stands at €241, while average household expenditures is over €226 per month. This is set to increase as the government forecasts that inflation could hit 8 percent this year.

Trade unions estimate that the average salary has dropped by 3 percent since the beginning of 2006.

### **State TV and radio in Norway hit by industrial action**

On May 29, state TV and radio broadcasting in Norway was affected by a strike organised by the Norwegian Union of Journalists (NJ) and LO-Stat, a public sector trade union confederation. The workers have rejected pay offers from the state broadcaster NRK.

The strike began at 3 p.m. local time following the unions' rejection of a proposed solution by state mediation 11 hours after the deadline for negotiations. Two others trade unions involved in the dispute reached an agreement with the mediator.

The action hit mainly news and sports broadcasting with the traditional, high-profile track and field event, Bislett Games, being severely affected.

### **Lecturers continue strike in Northern Ireland**

Lecturers at 16 further education colleges in Northern

Ireland struck on May 31 in a pay dispute. The staff agreed the terms of a pay increase with management, but the agreement has been halted due to a government limit on pay rises.

The stoppage involved about 2,000 lecturers and was their second walkout in a week. Staff struck all further education colleges on May 25.

College directors are meeting with the Department of Employment and Learning in an attempt to resolve the dispute. Lecturers' pay had fallen over the last decade. Unions claim that it has fallen so drastically that lecturers average salary is £2,500 lower than school teachers.

### **Netherlands: Beiersdorf workers strike against job losses and plant closure**

Staff employed by Beiersdorf, the maker of Nivea creams, struck on May 29 to protest plans by the company to shed 170 of 240 jobs and close its plant in the town of Almere. The action was called by the FNV Bondgenoten trade union.

### **Bus drivers in Nottingham strike over pay**

Bus drivers in the city of Nottingham, England struck for 24 hours on May 27 in a dispute over pay. The workers are members of the Transport & General Workers Union and have rejected a 2.4 percent pay offer from management at Nottingham City Transport.

The action involved about 200 workers and affected some 100 bus routes in and around the city. The TGWU said that more one-day stoppages would be held pending the resolution of the dispute.

### **Firefighters in Hertfordshire, England continue strike action**

Firefighters in the county of Hertfordshire in England continued their campaign of industrial action on May 30. Firefighters are protesting at the loss of more than 40 part-time jobs and the closure of two retained fire stations at Radlett and Bovington.

The action was originally planned to be a 48-hour strike, but was reduced to one of eight hours duration

by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). This decision followed an appeal by the county council for time to consider proposals put forward at the weekend by the union.

The strike was the third eight-hour walkout in recent weeks and Hertfordshire, with a population of 1 million, was left without fire service cover. The strike is the first in England in which the armed forces have not provided emergency cover. The FBU plans to hold two further stoppages next week if the dispute is not resolved.

## **Africa**

### **Striking telecom workers attacked by police in Sierra Leone**

Striking telecom workers in Sierra Leone, employees of Sierratel, were attacked by police. The police claimed that they had received reports that the strikers had wanted to burn down the Sierratel head office. The workers' representative dismissed the claims, saying, "We have been around the building for the past two weeks going on peacefully with our strike. If we had the intention to burn the building that would have been done."

Two of the strikers were still in police custody when the *Concord Times* (a newspaper based in the capital, Freetown) reported on the strike on May 24.

Edward Gbondo, the secretary general of the Postal and Telecommunications Union, was reported to have called a halt to the strike action for a period of four days. He was accused of a sell-out.

### **Nigerian Telecommunications workers protest**

Strike action began this week at Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL) over unpaid salaries and allowances. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has written to the minister of communication, Cornelius Adabayo, over what it calls the anti-labour practices of NITEL, saying it had put its staff into abject poverty and was unable to meet the needs of their families.

The NLC alleges that workers have not been paid since February of this year, despite the fact that NITEL is the flagship telecommunications company in Nigeria. Some of the staff had been evicted from their homes for unpaid rent whilst others had seen their children forced out of school because of unpaid fees. One worker had committed suicide by jumping out of the third floor of NITEL's head office building, allegedly because of the

bad situation in the company, and another had attempted to hang himself.

### **Fishery workers strike in South Africa**

Around 1,200 fish processing workers went out on strike at Sea Harvest in Saldanha, Durban, South Africa on May 22.

The workers are members of the Food and Allied Workers' Union (FAWU) and are striking over a restructuring process which has already led to more than 50 redundancies. Six hundred fishermen are also off work—although not on strike—due to the lack of facilities to process the catch.

Although some workers have accepted the severance package or an alternative position, FAWU's full-time shop steward has not accepted the conditions. A further eight people are being laid off at the company's Cape Town head office.

FAWU is demanding that management give an annual bonus to those being retrenched, and that the shop steward is allowed to keep his position. Dominique Swartz, FAWU's media officer, said that the union was prepared to accept two weeks' pay for every year worked, whereas normally it would ask for four weeks.

Sea Harvest is a subsidiary of the Tiger Brands group, which produce consumer goods. A wider strike by about 4,000 fishery workers is planned for June 2 and June 7, in opposition to management plans for restructuring the industry.



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