

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

18 August 2006

## Europe

### **French airport security staff strike over pay and working conditions**

French airport security staff struck on August 11 in a dispute over pay, working conditions and job security. The industrial action coincided with the introduction of stricter security measures at French airports due to the alleged plot to blow up commercial airliners flying from Britain to the US.

Workers staged strike action at Paris's Charles de Gaulle and Orly airports. A report on France-2 TV showed several dozen security workers marching through a terminal at Charles de Gaulle airport with banners and chanting slogans demanding better job security.

On August 10, the Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy announced that airport had to implement "100 percent searches" on all hand luggage on flights heading to the United States, Britain and Israel.

### **Corrugated box plant staff strike in Cork, Ireland**

On August 14, 130 workers employed by Smurfit Kappa at its corrugated box plant at Togher, Cork, staged a one-day strike in a dispute over the contributory sick pay scheme currently in operation at the company. As well as the industrial action, a ban on overtime is also in place.

The staff are members of the SIPTU trade union and have rejected recommendations from the Labour Court regarding improvements to the scheme. Smurfit Kappa claims that these include a doubling of both contributions and benefits. Workers are demanding a non-contributory sick pay scheme.

The workers have been demanding a decent sick pay scheme for several years, and the stoppage began after the negotiations in the Labour Court failed to reach agreement.

Local SIPTU representative Bill Mulcahy said that if staff were sick, they would receive just under €130 a week, half of which they have contributed themselves.

Even with any additional social security entitlement, this amount would be far lower than their average paid weekly wage.

SIPTU said that the strike action would continue every Monday for the next three weeks if the dispute is not resolved.

### **Ambulance staff in northwest England protest NHS restructuring**

Ambulance workers in Merseyside and Cheshire, England, took industrial action on August 12. The technicians and high-dependency staff are members of the Ambulance Service Union. The staff held the 12-hour action to protest changes to National Health Service pay bands.

The workers are employed by the North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust, which is currently restructuring the system. The changes introduce a new basic salary with additional payments for working unsociable hours. Staff fear that these changes could lead to cuts in the hourly rate of pay and bonuses.

### **Domestic staff at health care trust in northeast England continue strike action**

Some 250 GMB domestic staff employed at South Tyneside Foundation National Health Service Trust in the northeast of England continued their dispute last week with a seven-day strike beginning on August 8. The industrial action is the third staged by the workers in the dispute over their job description.

The employees, members of the GMB trade union, struck at several sites including the South Tyneside Hospital, Palmers Hospital and Primrose Hospital, as well as at smaller sites such as clinics and GP surgeries.

The domestics staged a one-day strike on July 20 and a one-week stoppage on July 27. The workers' main grievance is that, as they are fully trained and able to fulfil any domestic role within the Trust, a single job description is needed. Management at the Trust have rejected this on the grounds that it is not flexible enough.

## **Africa**

### **Namibian Coca-Cola workers fired for going on strike**

More than 90 temporary staff at the Coca-Cola bottling plant in Oshakati, Namibia, have been sacked after they went on strike to oppose their exclusion from washing facilities.

Coca-Cola management blamed the labour-hire company Africa Personnel Services, saying that APS employees had been told last month to stop using the facilities and that the temporary labour firm should have provided their own facilities instead.

Acting as a spokesperson the workers, Salomo Nangolo said that they could not stop using the facilities since there was nowhere else for them to get washed and dressed after handling dirty bottle crates. In a report in the *Namibian*, Nangolo was said to have complained about the dismissals to the workers' union, the Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (Nafau), but the union had not come to their aid.

### **Striking South African shop workers face intimidation and accusations**

Striking employees at the retail outlet Shoprite Checkers in South Africa have been subject to bullying and intimidation on the picket line. A local businessman first demanded that pickets move away from a Shoprite store in Pretoria, then drove into the picket line, injuring one of the strikers.

The strikers have also faced accusations that they are responsible for arson attacks on some of the stores, as well as threats that the affected stores could close. According to an article in the *Cape Times*, nine of the strikers were arrested after three Shoprite stores were set alight.

Shoprite management are now attempting to use the courts to get the strikers' union, the South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (Saccawu), made responsible for the fire damage to the stores by claiming that they issued instructions to strikers to carry out the attacks.

Saccawu refuted the company's claims that they were involved in any acts of vandalism, describing their allegations as "malicious if not propaganda."

### **Kenyan road workers strike over low pay and harassment**

On August 14, around 400 road repair workers took strike action to oppose working long hours for

"peanuts" and harassment by China Roads and Bridges management. Workers complained that they were not being issued with pay slips, that their overtime rates were low and that they were not paid for time off due to sickness.

The strikers complain that drivers are supposed to be paid Sh97 (US \$1.34) an hour, but management was paying them only Sh38 (US \$0.53). Casual workers get a fixed payment of only Sh200 (US \$2.77) per day, regardless of the hours they work.

The strike was undermined by the union involved, the Kenya Building, Construction, Timber, Furniture and Allied Industries Employees Union, agreeing to end the strike without consulting the workers. Union branch secretary Hudson Sande told the *Nation* that the union had signed a deal with China Roads and Bridges, and as a result they expected the workers to return to work immediately.

Isaiah Onyango, the shop steward commented that "What we wanted was a month's pay arrangement and not a week's schedule as the union has agreed with the China Roads management." He told the *Nation* that the workers had not accepted the deal due to "teething problems."

### **Teachers demonstrate in Guinea-Bissau**

About 500 schoolteachers marched through the capital of Guinea-Bissau over non-payment of their salaries for the last 14 months. They are refusing to release year-end exam results until they receive all the outstanding arrears.

This tiny West African country, one of the 20 poorest nations in the world, relies mainly on the export of cashew nuts for its income and has a long history of not paying the salaries of government workers. Civil service unions are threatening large-scale strikes unless the arrears are paid.



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