

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

25 August 2006

Europe

Auto component workers in Wales stage industrial action

On August 23, auto workers employed by Dura Automotive Systems in Llanelli, Wales began indefinite industrial action in a dispute over compensation and redundancy packages. The 270 staff are members of the Amicus union.

The plant, which makes car cable control systems, is being run down from the end of September, and is due to close at the end of the year. The workers are demanding increased redundancy and compensation payments.

Legal representatives at refugee centre in England strike

Amicus union members staged strike action at the Oakington Detention Centre near Cambridge, England on August 22. The staff are employed by the Refugee Legal Centre (RLC) to provide legal representation to asylum seekers detained in Oakington. They are protesting the RLC's decision to make 14 redundancies without any consultation. Further redundancies are planned at the end of September and more workers are to be redeployed from the site.

Amicus regional organiser Sarah Carpenter said, "This is a human rights organisation that is abandoning agreed policies and sacrificing people when it suits them, which is exactly what our members at Oakington seek to defend their clients from."

Air France pilots strike

Air France pilots organised in one of the smaller airline unions, Syndicat national du personnel navigant de l'aviation civile (SNPNAC), struck on August 22 and 23 to protest working conditions.

The union represents about five percent of Air France's pilots. The strike was held between 6am and 10am local time each day.

SNPNAC said it endorsed the industrial action as it disagreed with a previous contract agreement signed

with the airline in May by other unions. SNPNAC said salary levels were the main issue of dispute at that time, and it estimates 70 percent of Air France's pilots opposed the original agreement.

Miners at Yeniseyskaya Mine in Siberia continue hunger strike

More protesters joined a hunger strike by miners in the Yeniseyskaya coal mine in Khakassia, south central Siberia last week. On August 18, 13 more joined the strike, bringing the total number involved to 43 miners and their supporters, including four women.

The strikers are demanding the payment of wage arrears and holiday pay, and are protesting the mine's threatened closure. They are also demanding that the mine owner, Alexander Shklyaev, be subjected to criminal proceedings for repeated delays in wage payments and the mine's impending bankruptcy.

Caterers strike SAS Airlines in Copenhagen

On August 17, 700 caterers employed by LSG Sky Chef struck SAS Airlines in Copenhagen, Denmark in a dispute over poor staffing levels and breaches of promises by their employer. LSG Sky Chef is owned by Lufthansa, the German airline.

As a result of the stoppage, SAS flights leaving Copenhagen did not have food on board—mainly affecting travellers on long-haul SAS flights.

Public sector workers in Turkey stage protest

On August 23, thousands of members of the Confederation of Public Labourers (KESK) met in Kizilay Square, Ankara to protest the government's pay rise proposal for the year 2007. After the rally they marched to Ankara's Guven Park for a sit-in protest. The protest lasted until 10 pm and the following day demonstrators began their sit-in protest at the same venue.

Yearly wage negotiations between civil servant unions and the government covering nearly 2.5 million public sector workers began August 15. Due to rising inflation levels, public sector workers are facing

another loss in real wages. For this year, the total wage increase is 7.1 percent, but the annual inflation rate anticipated by the Central Bank is 10.5 percent.

Due to the rotten role of the trade union bureaucracy, the real wages of public sector workers have not recovered to their 2000 level, when the International Monetary Fund-backed austerity programme began to be implemented. Consequently, the monthly wages of 98.5 percent of public sector workers are below the poverty line.

According to the restrictive legal framework in Turkey, civil servants are not allowed to strike and yearly wage negotiations have to be finalised in 15 days, before compulsory arbitration takes effect.

Turkey: Police violence against protesting shipyard workers

On August 23, a group of workers employed at the Desan Shipyard based in Tuzla, Istanbul—the country’s largest industrial zone for shipbuilding—organised a protest in response to frequent occupational accidents at their workplace and at other shipyards.

A heavy police presence surrounded the workers, who carried banners saying, “We don’t want to die,” “Shipyard or Slaughterhouse,” “We demand our right to live.” At one point the police suddenly began attacking the demonstrators and used tear gas against them. Six protesters, including some leaders of the Shipbuilding and Ship Repair Workers’ Union, were detained by the police.

Africa

Mobil gas workers in Nigeria strike to demand pay rise

Workers at the ExxonMobil gas facility in Bonny, Nigeria (in the Niger Delta) went on strike August 21 to demand a pay rise. The workers are employed by the South Korean-based Daewoo Engineering Company Ltd.

“The workers down[ed] tools on Monday to protest the non-implementation of an agreement with Daewoo to raise their monthly wages from N5,000 (\$40.80) to N15,000 (\$122)” a source told *This Day*.

Daewoo is acting as a subcontractor to upgrade the facilities at ExxonMobil’s Bonny River Natural Gas Liquids (NGL) facility. ExxonMobil holds 40 percent of the facility and the Nigerian government holds the other 60 percent.

South African cleaners continue strike action

Cleaners in South Africa are continuing their strike action, which started on August 1 in pursuit of an increased pay offer. Over August 24 and 25 they were to hold demonstrations at international airports to raise the profile of the strike. There were also reports that demonstrations are to be called in private hospitals and shopping malls.

Workers belonging to 16 different unions are involved in the nationwide strike. The biggest union involved, the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (Satawu), has now called for sympathy strikes by workers in KwaZulu-Natal, who previously had been unaffected by the strike due to a settlement reached in a separate bargaining arrangement.

The strikers have been demanding a 12 percent increase for urban and 15 percent for rural workers. Currently, the minimum pay for urban cleaners is R8.57 per hour (\$1.21) and for rural workers R6.87 per hour (\$0.97). The cleaners are also demanding an annual bonus equivalent to one month’s pay and full contribution to the provident fund by the employers.



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