

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

8 September 2006

Alitalia staff in Italy strike

On September 7, pilots and cabin crew began a 24-hour strike at the Italian airline Alitalia in protest at the airline's failure to honour previous contract agreements.

The company announced that it was to cancel some 179 flights (105 national and 74 international) as a result.

UK driving examiners stage industrial action

Driving test examiners in England, Wales and Scotland staged 24-hour industrial action on September 4 in a protest against job losses, restructuring and changes in working practices being imposed by the Driving Standards Agency (DSA).

The action involved some 2,000 staff and resulted in the cancellation of around 60 percent of driving tests at the 437 driving test centres across the UK, according to the Public and Commercial Services Union. The union said that its members were striking as the plans would lead to the loss of 80 jobs and the closure of sites in Edinburgh, Birmingham and London. The restructuring would also increase the workload of driving examiners, leading to longer waiting times for members of the public wishing to take a test, said the PCS.

The DSA claims that its proposed changes are based on making the best use of public money and improving road safety.

The action was the second strike held to protest the plans of the DSA, with the first being held in July. That stoppage led to the cancellation of 42 percent of scheduled tests.

Postal staff in England strike

Postal workers employed by Royal Mail at the Witney and Carterton delivery offices, West Oxfordshire, staged a third day of industrial action on September 4 to protest allegations of bullying and harassment of staff by management.

The stoppage involved some 100 members of the Communication Workers Union. The union said that

further strikes were planned for September 28 and 29 pending the resolution of the dispute.

Whipps Cross hospital workers in London continue industrial action

On August 30, hospital workers including domestics, porters and catering staff at the Whipps Cross hospital in Leytonstone, East London, began a three-day strike in a dispute over equal pay and conditions. The strikers are employed by Rentokil Initial. Some 200 members of staff are involved in the ongoing strike. Workers at the hospital also carried out a series of one- and two-day strikes during August to register their grievances.

Prior to the latest industrial action, workers rejected an offer from management under the Agenda for Change scheme. The offer was based on the pay of workers directly employed by the National Health Service and backdated to April. However only £500 of the £1,400 owed in backdated London weighting was offered by management. London weighting is paid to public sector workers in London due to the increased cost of living in the capital.

The Agenda for Change pay rates were agreed between management and trade unions three years ago and were due to be implemented earlier this year. Since 2004 employees of Rentokil have struck over pay at a number of hospitals in England, including Barnsley, Birmingham and Stockport.

Nigerian civil servants take industrial action

Civil servants in the Nigerian state of Kogi began indefinite strike action September 4 to demand salary and allowances that went unpaid for three months in 2000. The workers' demands also include payment of outstanding bonuses from the years 2000 through 2002, a 12.5 percent salary increase and the doubling of the monthly pensioners grant.

Botswana miners defy union to remain on strike

Just under 200 machine minders began strike action September 2 at the BCL company mine at Selebi-Phikwe in Botswana. The mine produces copper, nickel

and cobalt. The action is in pursuit of a salary review dating back to 2004.

The workers are seeking a basic salary of 2,500 pula (\$390), but the latest offer from management would bring the basic salary to only 1,300 pula (\$205).

Bob Malele, secretary of the Botswana Mine Workers Union (BMWU), confirmed in press reports that he had attempted to get the strikers to return to work pending negotiations with management, but the workers had refused. He said the workers were concerned that management was trying to train recruits to replace the striking workers.

Malele has appealed to the government to intervene.

South African ammunition workers take strike action

Workers belonging to the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) have taken strike action at the Pretoria Metal Pressings (PMP) factory in Johannesburg. PMP is a section of the South African state ammunition manufacturer Denel.

According to the union around 1,000 workers are involved. The union is demanding a 20 percent pay increase for the lowest paid workers. The union pointed to salary disparities as “between R2,000 (\$270) for labourers, R20,000 (\$2,730) for supervisors and R 100,000 (\$13,640) for senior managers.”

South African Kraft Foods workers continue lockout

Over 300 workers at the Kraft Foods factory at Elandsfontein, South Africa, have been locked out since May 29. Negotiations to settle the dispute with the South African Food and Allied Workers union have broken down as management were intent on disciplinary action against workers, including union stewards, involved in the action.

Kraft is seeking job cuts at the factory in line with its plan to eliminate 8,000 jobs worldwide. Kraft’s parent company Altria has just increased its dividends to shareholders by 7.5 percent.



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