

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

29 December 2006

## Europe

### Postal workers stage national strike in Portugal

On December 27, postal workers in Portugal took nationwide strike action in a dispute over the hiring of subcontractors. Workers fear that the policy of sub-hiring companies to carry out work normally done by postal workers may lead to layoffs. An estimated 70 percent of night-shift employees reportedly joined the strike.

Some 13,000 workers are employed by CTT, the Portuguese postal service. The action is the latest in an ongoing dispute and is the third occasion this year that postal workers have held a national strike.

The strike resulted in delays in the delivery of transportation, distribution and handling of mail nationwide. During the evening, police were mobilised in an attempt to prevent workers on picket lines from stopping trucks from private mail-handling firms from leaving warehouses.

A smaller strike involving around 200 workers was also expected to go ahead on December 28 and 29 in the Coimbra district, affecting the distribution of mail in central Portugal.

### England: Central Trains conductors walk out

Railway workers employed by Central Trains in England walked off the job on Christmas Eve in a dispute over holiday pay and working arrangements. The stoppage involved some 580 senior conductors and led to the cancellation of 400 scheduled train services.

The strike had a widespread impact as thousands of passengers were forced to find alternative means of transport during one of the busiest periods of the year for rail travel.

The conductors, members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union (RMT), also plan to strike on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. An estimated 2,000 trains will be affected by delays or cancellations over the three-day period. Central Trains operates mainly in the East and West Midlands, and from

Manchester to Norwich and Cleethorpes to Cardiff.

The industrial action went ahead following a breakdown in talks earlier this week between the RMT and the employers. The union said the strike was being held to protest the "imposition of centralised rostering and Christmas and New Year pay arrangements."

The union issued a statement December 20 stating that it was prepared to call off the strikes if the company committed to a "peace plan." RMT General Secretary Bob Crow said, "Our talks team offered to suspend the three days of strike action if the company would commit itself to hammering out a peace plan on the issues we are in dispute over, but Central Trains have chosen instead to close the railway on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. Central Trains is clearly not interested in reaching a deal over the two disputes involved and has chosen instead to lock out its entire staff."

In a similar dispute, the union called off three days of holiday strikes due to be held by rail staff at the Midland Mainline train company. The dispute also involves pay enhancements for staff volunteering to work on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. The union called off the strike as it entered new talks with the company December 22. Midland Mainline operates trains from hubs in northern England to London and the south.

## Africa

### Zimbabwean university sacks striking lecturers

Thirteen lecturers from Solusi University in Zimbabwe have been dismissed after being accused of taking part in an illegal strike. The 13 lecturers refused to appear before a disciplinary committee, arguing that they could not attend a hearing without the presence of their lawyer. They also argued that their strike had not been declared illegal by the Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, Nicholas Goche.

The lecturers had launched a three-week strike in protest at their low salaries and working conditions.

The strikers complained that their current salary of \$46,000 (US\$190) per month was not enough for their families to live on.

### **Junior doctors in Zimbabwe out on strike**

Junior doctors in Harare and Bulawayo went out on strike on December 21, in opposition to salaries that are below the official poverty line, sub-standard accommodation and transport, and the lack of decent hospital facilities.

The casualty departments at Harare Hospital and Parirenyatwa Hospital in the capital and Bulawayo United and Mpilo Hospitals in Bulawayo either were accepting emergencies only or were completely closed.

### **Vote to end Ugandan lecturers' strike**

After an angry meeting, Ugandan university lecturers voted to end their strike at Makerere University that has continued for more than a month. Uganda's President Museveni held talks with some of the lecturers before the meeting, urging them to call off the strike.

The offer by the university authorities fell far short of the government's promises made in 2004 of a monthly basic salary of Shs2.8 million (US\$1,547) for a professor, Shs2.5 million (US\$1,381) for an associate professor, Shs1.76 million (US\$972) for a senior lecturer, Shs1.56 (US\$862) for a lecturer and Shs1.2 million (US\$663) for teaching assistants and assistant lecturers.



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