

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

2 March 2007

Europe

Volkswagen workers in Brussels strike to protest management/union deal

Auto workers at the Volkswagen Forest plant in Brussels, Belgium, walked off the job in unofficial strike action on February 26. The wildcat strike began in protest at some workers not being informed of the terms of a management/trade-union agreement to increase working hours from 35 to 38, with no increase in pay and the loss of a number of benefits.

The strike began when morning-shift workers blocked part of the assembly line. Some on the afternoon shift walked out in support. The following day, unions announced that 76.1 percent of the workers at the plant had voted in favour of the company/union accord. Under the plan, the factory is to be changed into one manufacturing Audi vehicles. Announcing the vote, Pascal Van Cauwenberg of the ACV union and Hedwin De Clercq of the ABVV said there is “a very clear majority in favour of the Audi plan.” Referring to the many workers who opposed the deal, they added, “The minority will have to accept this.”

The workforce occupied the factory from November 17 of last year until early January in an attempt to prevent redundancies and the plant’s possible closure. Large demonstrations were staged in the centre of Brussels. In December, unions at the plant agreed to thousands of job losses in order to slash costs in preparation for the company building the new Audi A1 model in Brussels.

England: Civilian employees strike Ministry of Defence

On February 28, civilian employees at Ministry of Defence (MoD) bases in Devon and Cornwall, England, staged a 24-hour strike in a dispute over pay. The workers are technical and specialist staff providing logistical support to the armed forces and are located at RNAS Culdrose, RAF St. Mawgan in Cornwall, and Devonport naval base in Plymouth.

The MoD has offered a below-inflation 2.5 percent pay deal for 2006 and 2007.

The strikers, members of the Prospect trade union, claimed that they stopped all military vessel movements at the Devonport naval base. Some 300 struck at Devonport and also struck at a training centre at Lymington and the naval college in Dartmouth.

Nick Wodge, a representative of the union, said, “Today there are no military ship movements being undertaken because the pilots, which we represent, are out on strike.”

UK civil servants protest restructuring and job losses

Civil servants throughout the UK staged a national day of action “short of a strike” on February 23. The action was organised by the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS). It is part of an ongoing campaign by civil servants to oppose government plans to shed 100,000 civil and public service jobs, cut pay, and outsource and privatise many services.

The day of action included PCS members not working any overtime, taking full rest and lunch breaks, and leaving work on time, and those staff employed on flexitime worked only the minimum hours required.

Africa

Doctors strike in Nigeria to oppose pay cut

Doctors in Nigerian federal government hospitals began a seven-day warning strike on February 26. The action consists of a partial strike, with doctors refusing to perform 24-hour emergency call duties. They are currently working from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Doctors are protesting the way the government has used a reorganisation of the salary structure—the Consolidated Tertiary Institution Salary Structure (CONTISS)—to impose a cut in their pay.

According to a report by the *Daily Champion* (a newspaper based in Lagos), most public hospitals are now refusing to accept any new patients, including

accident victims. The report warned that unless the government rescinds the pay cut, doctors will stop treating all patients from March 4.

The secretary of the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD), Dr. Henry Okpara, said, “[A] few months ago, we were informed that the salary will be increased by 15 percent and we were of high hope that it will also affect us. But when the circular came out, we discovered that instead of our salary appreciating, we were actually downscaled. This is the main reason [for the strike].”

Nigerian university staff suspend strike

Staff at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, have suspended their strike action over pension fund contributions after three weeks. The compulsory deduction of 7.5 percent from staff salaries to the contributory pension fund is illegal, according to the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), one of the three unions involved.

At a news conference, Dr. Ademola Aremu, the chairman of the local branch of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), said that the decision to call off the action had been reached at a joint meeting of the three industrial unions in the university, which included the Non Academic Staff Union (NASU) and the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU). He said they had decided to “allow the national body of the three unions to take up the deduction battle.”

No agreement has been made at Ibadan University regarding the refunding of the pensions deductions, as has happened elsewhere.

Indefinite strike called by South African bus workers

On February 26, the SA Transport and Allied Workers Union (Satawu) gave notice to Autopax, a division of the South African parastatal Transnet, that it would embark on an all-out strike in four days’ time. The company operates the well-known bus lines Translux and City to City; it has a fleet of 240 buses and makes 52 long-distance trips every day, including international trips. Satawu claims that the strike will have a huge effect on the company’s operations and could cost it more than R500,000 a day.

Ronnie Mamba, Satawu national spokesperson, told reporters, “[The strike] is indefinite, and it is in protest against repeated infringements of labour regulations by

the management of Autopax.”

Mamba said the strike was a reaction to a number of controversial decisions the company had implemented recently. These include a decision to impose a 4 percent wage increase without discussion with the unions, poor working conditions and introducing a new pay system where only one of two drivers on long-distance routes would be paid.

Autopax’s senior manager for risk and transport regulation, Carl Newman, said the parastatal was not aware of most of Satawu’s grievances until recently. Newman claims the only issue that the union had previously raised was that of wage increases. The matter was then referred to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, and it remained unresolved.

Protests have been planned to take place in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Bloemfontein, Durban, Port Elizabeth and East London.

Johannesburg bus workers maintain strike in defence of shop stewards

The strike of South African Metrobus workers, which has stopped buses running in Johannesburg since the end of January, is continuing. According to the South Africa Municipal Workers’ Union (Samwu), workers had been told they would lose entitlement to sick leave that had been accumulated over 15 years if it was not taken within 30 days. The leave had been accumulated under the public service company that was taken over by the Metrobus corporation.

Despite an agreement over sick leave payments having now been reached, the strikers are refusing to return to work. A spokesman for Samwu told reporters that his members would not return to work until three dismissed shop stewards were reinstated.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact