

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

6 April 2007

Europe

UK civil servants strike

Twenty thousand members of the Public & Commercial Services Union employed by the Ministry of Defence and Identity and Passports Service (IPS) in the UK staged a 24-hour national strike on March 30.

The strike is part of an ongoing campaign against the imposition of a below inflation pay rise and attacks on civil servants' jobs and working conditions.

The union represents around 230,000 workers throughout the public sector. Those not involved in the strike participated in supportive action, refusing to work paid or unpaid overtime and taking their full quota of rest and lunch breaks.

The action also marked the beginning of a month-long campaign of action short of a strike that will include PCS members employed by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Department of Health (DoH), Land Registry and Learning Skills Council (LSC).

Airbus workers in France strike

Two thousand five hundred Airbus employees at French sites struck for a half day on April 3 to protest plans by the company to shed thousands of jobs. The CGT and Force ouvriere trade unions called the strike. During the action workers gathered at the company's Toulouse headquarters chanting, "No to Power8."

Two of the Airbus trade unions, the CFE-CGC and the French Confederation of Christian Workers, refused to support the strike and denounced it as "irresponsible and suicidal."

In February Airbus announced plans to slash 10,000 jobs across its European operations as part of a restructuring plan known as Power8. Airbus plans to save €5 billion (\$6.6 billion) by 2010 as a result of the redundancies and other cost savings.

Up to 4,300 jobs are set to be lost in France, 3,700 in Germany, 1,600 in the UK and 400 in Spain.

Nurses and midwives in Ireland begin work to rule

On April 2 nurses and midwives throughout Ireland began a work to rule following a breakdown in talks the previous day between nursing unions, health service management and the National Implementation Body.

The 40,000 nurses and midwives are represented by the Irish Nurses Organisation and the Psychiatric Nurses Association. The work to rule involves not engaging in duties such as answering phones, attending meetings, using computers or any other tasks not stipulated in employment contracts.

Nurses and midwives are demanding a 10 percent pay rise and a 35-hour week.

Hungarian ground and refuelling staff strike at Budapest Airport

Ground staff employed by ground services company Celebi staged 24-hour industrial action at Budapest Airport in Hungary on March 31. The stoppage was called by the Independent Airworkers Trade Union and led to a number of flights at the Ferihegy airport being delayed. It overlapped with a seven-hour strike held by refuelling staff. The refuelling workers are employed by RUK, which supplies fuel to 90 percent of planes at the airport. The workers are demanding a pay increase of between 15 and 18 percent, while the company is proposing a 7.5 percent increase.

Port workers at Marseilles end 18-day strike

Port workers at the Fos-Lavera oil hub in the French port of Marseilles ended an 18-day strike on March 31. The dispute began on March 14 over whether dock workers or employees of Gaz de France would be authorised to discharge gas tankers at a new terminal. It ended following an agreement between trade unions and employers to allow port workers to load and unload gas.

During the action 39 oil tankers and 63 ships in total were prevented from docking. The strike had begun to threaten the movement of fuel supplies to France and neighbouring countries, including Germany and Switzerland. The port at Marseilles is the world's third biggest for dealing with oil products, with 64.2 million tonnes moving through it annually.

Ineo, a British chemical firm, was severely affected and announced prior to the agreement that it planned to shut down its 207,000 barrels-per-day Lavera refinery. It had been forced to cut production by a third in the last few days of the strike.

Other refineries dependent on the oil port include Total's Feyzin and La Mede and Esso's Fos-sur-Mer. The full

closure of these refineries would have cut European refinery capacity by 7 percent, or 1.10 million barrels per day.

Auto workers at Aston Martin in the UK vote to strike

On March 31, auto workers employed by Aston Martin voted to strike to protest differences in pay for performing the same job. The company's Gaydon plant workers voted 70 percent in favour of action.

Under the proposed two-year deal workers at Aston Martin are to be offered a pay increase of 4 percent in the first year, followed by 5 percent plus inflation the following year. Other workers are to be paid a £2,500 premium for doing the same work.

Transport and General Workers Union suspend food workers strike in Britain

On April 3, the Transport and General Workers Union in Britain announced that it had suspended a scheduled one-day strike by 2,600 pork and poultry workers at various plants of Grampian Foods in the UK. The move to suspend the strike for seven days followed talks with the Arbitration Conciliation and Advisory Service.

Workers at Grampian Foods had voted by a majority of 57 percent for industrial action to protest a pay freeze and pension cuts. Employees were set to strike on April 5 at Grampian Foods plants as well as other staff at a subsidiary of the company in Haverhill, Eye and Stoke Ferry in East Anglia, Witham in Essex, Wivelscombe in Somerset, Llangefnï, Sandycroft and Anglesey in North Wales, Cambuslang near Glasgow, Coupar Angus in Perthshire and Fairview near Edinburgh.

Africa

Strike brings Nigerian state courts to standstill

The Nigerian state courts were brought to a standstill on April 2 when court staff came out on national indefinite strike. It is the second time court workers have taken action in recent weeks. On this occasion, court workers in Osun supported the strike.

The *Daily Champion* reported that all the courts they visited were "under lock and key," including the high courts where judges were locked out of their offices. The judicial workers are demanding the implementation of a new minimum wage agreement.

Namibian Coca-Cola workers demonstrate against low pay

On April 2, more than 60 Namibian casual workers, contracted by African Personnel Services (APS) to work at the Coca-Cola plant at Windhoek, demonstrated outside the factory to demand payment of wages owed to them.

The workers include truck and forklift drivers, packers and bottle sorters. They expected to receive their pay cheques on March 30, but the majority received nothing.

After demanding payment before doing any further work,

the contract workers accused Coca-Cola of threatening them with canceling their contracts and getting replacements from APS.

One of the workers, Jas Kambatu, showed a reporter for the *Namibian* newspaper a cheque he had received for N\$4.75 (US \$0.67). He said, "Imagine being paid N\$4.75. Would you accept that?" Another worker added, "I've been coming to work despite not having been paid anything for the past two months."

The workers claim that they have no basic wage agreement and work on commission only. "We work on commission, but we're not even explained how this commission works," said Danie Platt, who has worked at the plant for a month. "We don't understand. We work, but what is our rate?"

Nigeria university teachers strike over pay and conditions

Nigerian university teachers are currently taking strike action for better pay and work conditions. The strike was called after talks broke down between the government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).

The union claims that the government has failed to implement an accord reached in 2001. In a statement the ASUU said it was protesting the poor state of the education system, which has compelled many university teachers to leave for other jobs.

Abdullahi Sule-Kano, president of ASUU, told Voice of America (VOA), "Our national executive council met and decided to declare a strike, and of course write to the government team that if it is sincere and they want a resolution of this problem, let them give an offer.... Let them respond to our proposals, that we are going to do this and this to address the problem of brain drain, we are going to do this and this to address the problem of rot in the system, we will come back to the negotiating table."

According to VOA, the falling number of teaching staff is placing intolerable burdens on those that remain, with class sizes that are often in the hundreds. Many students say they believe only those who can afford to pay bribes to teachers end up with high marks.



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