

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

8 June 2007

Europe

Airbus workers strike at three plants in Germany

On June 6, Airbus employees at three German plants took strike action to protest the ongoing restructuring plans by the company, including thousands of job losses. The Airbus staff walked off the job at plants in Varel, Nordenham and Laupheim. Under the restructuring, known as “Power 8,” the Laupheim and Varel plants are to be sold off while EADS—the parent firm of Airbus—is seeking a partner for the Nordenham operation.

Airbus plans to slash more than 10,000 jobs in Germany, France, Britain and Spain and to sell a number of its factories as part of overall plans to cut its costs by 30 percent over the next four years.

France Telecom employees take industrial action

On May 31, around 25 percent of staff employed by France Telecom struck to protest job cuts. The action was called by six trade unions over 22,000 job losses. Unions are calling for management to enter negotiations over employment, wages, working conditions and employee qualifications.

Polish doctors continue strike action

This week, Polish doctors continued their two-week strike by taking industrial action at more hospitals. According to the doctors’ union, only emergency services were being carried out at 230 of Poland’s 608 hospitals.

The doctors are in a pay dispute with the government and are demanding an increase for specialists to 7,500 zlotys. The basic salary of a doctor in Poland is 9.9 zlotys (€2.60 or US\$3.50) an hour.

During the action, doctors are not performing non-urgent medical services or carrying out administrative duties. At children’s hospitals, the doctors are working just one hour per day.

A reported 70 percent of doctors have handed in their notice at dozens of hospitals during the strike.

The government has offered a pay increase of 15

percent per year over the next three years, but Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski has stated that the government would not accept the doctors’ demands at any cost. “I’d rather lose power than give in to the doctors’ demands,” he said.

The union said that further talks with Finance Minister Zyta Gilowska are to be held this week.

Since Poland joined the European Union in May 2004, at least 5 percent of all Polish doctors are estimated to have left the country to seek jobs elsewhere in Europe.

Flight attendants strike at Alitalia

On June 4, flight attendants at Alitalia, the Italian state airline, struck for four hours. The attendants are attempting to force the company into new contract negotiations. The workers are members of the FTA-Cisal trade union.

On news of the stoppage, shares in the airline fell more than 3 percent to €0.789. Alitalia is currently in the process of being privatised. This week, one of the bidders—a consortium led by Texas Pacific Group—withdrawed from the auction to buy the airline. This also prompted a fall in the share price of the airline.

The action is the latest in a series of disputes affecting Alitalia, leading to numerous flight delays and cancellations. Last month, flight attendants and air traffic controllers forced Alitalia to cancel nearly 400 flights.

Doctors and nurses continue protests at main emergency hospital in Sofia, Bulgaria

This week, more than 100 doctors and nurses employed at the Pirogov emergency hospital in Sofia, Bulgaria, held a demonstration to protest low pay and poor working conditions. They are calling for increased government subsidies for emergency services and a fairer distribution of the money earned by the hospital for the clinical treatment of patients.

The June 5 rally was the latest action in a dispute in

which staff took strike action for one hour on May 18. Following the latter action, employees threatened to launch a full-scale strike if the health ministry did not meet their demands. More than 2,000 staff at the hospital have signed a petition calling for a strike.

The hospital is the main emergency hospital in the city and the biggest in the country.

Africa

Chadian general strike enters second month

An all-out strike of public sector workers in Chad has entered its second month. Since May 2, most of the country's schools, hospitals, clinics and almost all government administrative services have been at a standstill. The action began on May 2, when the majority of Chad's 32,000 civil servants went on strike to demand a pay increase of at least 25 percent.

The government has recently increased its offer to 15 percent, whilst claiming that to pay the increase would penalise the majority of Chadians. The unions has restored minimum services in the hospitals, but the co-ordinator of the action, Djibrine Assali, told IRIN that his members have rejected the government's offer and nothing has really changed.

One secondary school teacher, Laldjim Narcisse, told IRIN, "If the salaries are not paid, we are ready to go to the streets.... The government has much more money than it had before [from oil revenue] but it is only using it to buy weapons."

A report from the International Monetary Fund shows that Namibia, which is one of the poorest countries in the world, has spent at least 12 percent of its budget on the military, not including soldiers' wages. According to IRIN, it has recently purchased five new combat helicopters and other high-tech equipment.

Namibian meat workers dismissed for going on strike

On May 29, a Namibian disciplinary hearing ruled that 21 workers employed by Meatco, at the Windhoek abattoir in Namibia, had participated in an illegal strike in April and should be dismissed. Two days later, a further 10 workers at an abattoir were sacked even though the chairperson of the disciplinary hearing, Sisa Namandje, had recommended that they be issued written warnings and subjected to a fine.

The walkout had been triggered by the suspension of a shop steward, Ebenhardt Kanguru, who had been accused of assaulting another employee. A few hours

later, the employee who made the original complaint had retracted his accusation and the workers demanded that the suspension be lifted, but Meatco management refused.

As a result, 119 employees on the sheep and cattle slaughter floors began strike action on April 19 to demand the shop steward's reinstatement. The slaughter of animals was stopped entirely by the strike. The abattoir is capable of slaughtering 430 cattle and 1,400 sheep per day, and the strike cost the company more than N\$30 million (US\$4.3 million).

The company immediately claimed that the strike was illegal and issued notices demanding workers return to their jobs. The workers returned to work the following day.



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