

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

15 June 2007

## Europe

### **Strike by parts supplier in France stops production at two Peugeot plants**

On June 11, auto production at two Peugeot plants in eastern France ground to a halt due to a strike by workers at car parts supplier Visteon in the town of Bellignat. Workers at Visteon are in dispute with management over the loss of 158 out of the 308 jobs at the factory. The Visteon plant supplies several components for the interior of the Peugeot vehicles.

The main plant to be affected was Peugeot's Sochaux factory, which employs 6,000 workers and manufactures the 307, 607 and the future 308 models. On June 8 production also stopped at a Peugeot factory in the town of Mulhouse. The latter plant produces the C4 model.

### **Lectures continue strike at Harlow College, England**

On June 11, lecturers at Harlow College in England began a three-day strike to protest the imposition of a new college plan which staff fear will result in pay cuts, lecturers being downgraded to tutors, all teaching staff reapplying for their own jobs, an increased workload and shorter holidays. The University and College Union is also protesting the lack of any serious consultation from management.

On June 13, striking staff and students from the college marched through Harlow town centre. The action follows two days of industrial action last month on May 24 and 25. Students at the college have shown their support for the lecturers by staging a rooftop protest.

### **Postal workers in UK vote to strike over pay and job losses**

Postal workers employed by Royal Mail voted by more than a three-quarters majority to take industrial action. The result of the ballot was announced on June 7 at the annual conference of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) in Bournemouth.

The CWU represents 130,000 staff employed by Royal Mail. Were industrial action to proceed it would be the first national postal strike since 1996. The union is in dispute with Royal Mail over a 2.5 percent pay offer and threats to 40,000 postal workers' jobs. Some 5,000 of the CWU members working in Post Offices were balloted in protest at planned closures, pay and the moving of post offices inside stores of the high street retailer WH Smith. Cash handlers, who deliver money to post offices, also voted to strike.

The CWU is campaigning for its members' pay to be increased to that of the national average over the next five years. The Royal Mail has rejected this, stating that such a move would cost £1 billion and was unaffordable.

Under trade union legislation the union is obliged to give Royal Mail seven days notice of any industrial action. The CWU has called for further negotiations regarding the dispute, but has announced that it would meet this week to decide on the dates of a series of one-day strikes.

### **Contractors at Welsh power plant stage wildcat strike after worker's death**

Several hundred workers employed at the Aberthaw power station in the Vale of Glamorgan, outside Cardiff, Wales, walked off the job in unofficial strike action June 12.

The walkout followed the death of a 49-year-old construction and maintenance worker who fell from a platform into a pit last week. The site is owned by NPower and is currently being serviced. The strikers were reported to be contractors employed by AMEC and Alstom. One of their demands is for a full-time medic to be based at the site.

## Africa

### **Seven sentenced to lengthy jail terms in Morocco for May Day demonstration**

Seven Moroccan activists, who were arrested after May 1 International Labour Day demonstrations and

charged with “insulting sacred doctrines,” have been found guilty of “undermining the monarchy” and given hefty prison sentences.

Mehdi Berbouchi and Abderrahim Karrad were arrested in Agadir, and Thami Khyati, Youssef Reggab, Oussama Ben Messaoud, Ahmed Al Kaateb and Rabii Raïssouni were arrested in Ksar El Kebir. All seven have been sentenced to two to three years’ imprisonment and fines of 10,000 dirhams (US\$1,200) each.

People organising sit-ins to protest against the crackdown have also been arrested and charged with the same offence. At least 10 people were arrested following a sit-in at Beni Mellal on June 5. According to Amnesty International, those imprisoned were chanting slogans such as “No more taboos, More freedom” in a peaceful manner.

The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information said that two of those arrested on May 1 stated at their trial on May 10 that confessions had been extracted from them using torture. Defence lawyers were reportedly prevented from calling witnesses during the trials.



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