Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

6 July 2007

Europe

Postal workers in UK stage national strike over pay and jobs threat

On June 29, postal workers employed by the Royal Mail in the UK began their first national strike in 11 years. The workers are members of the Communications Workers Union (CWU) and are in dispute with the company over a below-inflation pay offer of 2.5 percent and threats to cut 40,000 jobs.

An estimated 124,000 staff participated in the 24-hour industrial action, affecting the delivery of residential mail and the collection of mail from business customers. The strike went ahead following the breakdown of talks between the union and Royal Mail Chief Executive Adam Crozier on June 27.

The CWU said this week that that Royal Mail is refusing to negotiate. “The truth is they are intent on cutting services, cutting jobs and cutting pay,” the union said in a statement.

Volvo workers at truck plant in Sweden strike

On June 28, 150 workers employed at the Volvo Trucks plant in Umeå, Sweden took unofficial strike action for 90 minutes in response to ongoing talks over pay. The strike began at 10 a.m. local time after workers learned that management had offered a pay increase of 80 kronor (€ 8.73) a month. The trade union at the plant said that it was demanding a pay deal of 2,050 kronor (€ 224) per month per employee, to be distributed according to where and how many hours individual employees work.

The union and management have agreed to suspend negotiations on pay until after the summer holidays. The union sought to dissociate itself from any unofficial action, stating that it did not support wildcat strikes.

Russian chemical workers begin hunger strike over unpaid wages

On June 25, 30 employees of the Russian State Institute of Organic Synthesis Technology (FGUP GITOS) began an indefinite hunger strike to demand the Federal Agency for Industry settle wage arrears, dating back to 2003.

The FGUP GITOS, the only industrial employer in the town of Shikhany, in the Russian Saratov Region, is currently going through bankruptcy procedures. According to the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers’ Unions, workers at the plant intend to “organise a march to Moscow and file a mass complaint with the European Human Rights Court.”

The federation has sent a letter to the Russian prime minister, demanding a resolution to the dispute based on a “settlement of all social benefits and wage arrears, which currently stand at 88 million rubles (€ 2.5 million), including wage arrears, union dues, payments to the pension fund and health benefits.”

Africa

South African mobile phone workers strike

The long-running dispute over union recognition at South African mobile phone operator Vodacom erupted again on July 2, when the union said that 1,325 workers had gone on strike out of the total workforce of 4,300. The Communication Workers Union (CWU) is trying to pressure management to recognize it and give its shop stewards paid time off to perform union duties.

CWU says that Vodacom employs only 2,500 permanent staff, and that its membership is well over the 30 percent threshold at which it should receive official recognition. Vodacom claims that CWU membership is less than 15 percent.

A demonstration took place on July 4, with over 200 workers marching from the workplace in Gauteng to the Vodacom headquarters in Midrand. The strike began after negotiations over wages, conditions and bargaining rights had broken down. As it did during the last strike in March this year, Vodacom applied for and received a court interdict restricting picketing at the entrance to the workplace.

© World Socialist Web Site

Vodacom is jointly owned by the UK-based Vodafone and the South African landline operator Telkom.

Thousands of Nigerian public service workers continue strike

Thousands of public service workers in Oyo State, Nigeria, met at the state headquarters of the Nigeria Labor Congress (NLC) to ensure the continuation of their strike to force withdrawal of a pay cut.

The workers have been on strike since June 26. Their employers tried to force a return to work by issuing an attendance register that would be used to determine who was being employed, but this failed.

The meeting at the NLC headquarters took on a celebratory atmosphere after it was announced that the head of state police, Jonathan Johnson, had been redeployed. Johnson had overseen the police when they stood by to allow an attack by a gang of thugs upon the strikers, and he afterwards claimed that it was the strikers who had instigated the violence.

The state government has invited union leaders to take part in talks, but the NLC leaders have stated that they will not do so until the government gives them a guarantee of their security.

South African authorities get court order to stop strike by electricity workers

The South African energy company Eskom has successfully applied to the courts for a ruling banning the three power unions—National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) and Solidarity—from calling a strike to back their demand for a 12 percent pay increase.

The company argued that the electricity workers were essential and should not be allowed to strike. In contrast to the aggressive tactics of the employers, the unions are already backing down from their demand for a 12 percent increase. NUM negotiator Paris Mashego said that the unions “are prepared to lower our demands and to negotiate with the employer.”

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site