

# Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

10 August 2007

## Germany: Court bans railway workers strike

A German court has ruled that the strike planned by train drivers and guards for August 9 cannot go ahead, upholding the injunction that had been sought by the employers, Deutsche Bahn.

A labour court in Nuremberg ruled that the union could not take strike action during the summer holiday period as this would cause major economic damage. The court ruling is an attack on the right to strike, which in Germany is constitutionally guaranteed.

Earlier this month, a ballot of 12,000 train drivers and guards who work for Deutsche Bahn had returned an almost 96 percent vote for strike action in support of their pay demands.

The drivers' union GdL is calling for a 31 percent wage rise, saying that German train drivers are among the poorest paid in Europe. For example, a 40-year-old train driver with two children earns about €1,800 a month in Germany, compared with €4,800 in Switzerland, €3,140 in Spain and €2,770 in France.

While it pays its frontline staff breadline wages, Deutsche Bahn's net income last year tripled to €1.7 billion as freight and passenger demand rose with the football World Cup.

Germany's biggest rail strike for 15 years could cost up to €3 million a day in lost revenues and disruptions; it also threatens to undermine plans for the privatisation of Deutsche Bahn this autumn, according to Claudia Kemfert, a transport expert at the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW).

The GdL cancelled Thursday's strike, saying it would appeal the ruling.

It has appealed against the injunction, which expires on September 30 and covers both long-distance freight and passenger traffic—but not regional and commuter trains. Train drivers stopped work for two hours in Berlin and Hamburg yesterday. DB is seeking similar judgments covering these services. The appeal is expected to be ruled on today.

Manfred Schell, the GdL's chairman, said, "It is inconceivable that a German court could confiscate from a union its constitutional right to strike."

The union would not give advanced announcements of strike plans in future, he added.

## Germany: Pilots strike at Munich and Düsseldorf airports

Pilots working for package holiday company LTU took protest strike action Thursday in support of their pay demands.

The two-hour strike at two of Germany's busiest airports disrupted holiday flights to Greece, Turkey and Spain, delaying over 2,000 LTU customers.

The pilot's union Cockpit had called for the protest strike in advance of a ballot on further industrial action that will be concluded early next week. The union's rules require at least a 70 percent vote in favour to sanction wider strike action.

## Strike ballot on London Underground

Members of London Underground's two largest unions are being balloted for strike action over a threat to jobs and conditions, following the collapse of Metronet, the private company responsible for the maintenance of the underground rail network.

The RMT and TSSA unions are balloting their members to oppose job losses, pension cuts and forced transfers as a result of the bankruptcy of Metronet, which went into administration earlier this month. The ballot result will be announced on August 20.

Administrators for the company, which had projected an overspend of £2 billion by 2010, have failed to give any guarantees regarding the jobs and conditions of its 2,600 workers.

## UK: Brewery workers vote for strike

Brewery workers at Scottish and Newcastle have voted to take industrial action in opposition to company plans to end the link between basic pay, overtime and other bonuses.

The company is the UK's second largest brewer.

Union members at the Reading brewery voted for strike by an 82 percent majority unless the firm rescinded its plans. More than 90 percent supported action short of strike, such as an overtime ban.

Unite, the union representing the workers, is seeking further negotiations.

### **UK: Glasgow care workers continue strike**

Social care staff in Glasgow will continue their strike after a rejecting a pay offer from the city council.

Some 550 workers represented by the Unison union have been taking strike action since July 24 in a dispute over a salary and grading review. At a general meeting last week, the strikers overwhelmingly rejected an offer from the council, which they feel does not reflect the responsibilities of the job they carry out.

The dispute involves staff providing social care to some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups including children at risk, vulnerable adults and offenders, and all the city's methadone users.

The council proposals seek to divide workers since only one third would have received an immediate pay increase, whereas others would take up to three years to progress up the new pay scales. Unison is also balloting other members of the council's social work teams to take supportive strike action.

### **Steel and pipeline workers strike in Algeria**

Around 8,000 Algerian steelworkers employed by Mittal are on strike at sites around the country in opposition to management plans to dismiss 1,200 workers. The company was forced to halt its operations throughout the country.

Since Mittal acquired ownership of the group in 2001, it has cut the workforce from 14,000 to 8,000. The latest job cuts would mean the reduction of the workforce to 4,800 by 2008.

Also in Algeria, 570 workers at a gas pipeline have been on strike for five weeks. The dispute began when a union member criticized the loss of a maintenance contract, and was dismissed as a result. The workers have been demanding his reinstatement, but management has refused. Strikers have been holding daily pickets outside the company headquarters since the strike began, and the pipeline has been kept closed.

### **South African fuel strike ends**

After a strike lasting eight days, thousands of South African fuel industry workers are now returning to work, after a deal was struck on August 7.

The workers' union, the Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union, had demanded a 10 percent pay increase, but got 8.5 percent in addition to some increases in benefits. Workers have been told they will now get maternity leave and payment for public holidays, and that they will move to a 40-hour week.

The fuel shortages are expected to continue for some days after the strike has finished. Petrol stations in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape ran out of fuel some days ago.



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