

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

17 August 2007

Post Office staff strike at 18 locations in UK

On August 13, staff at 18 Post Offices took strike action in an ongoing dispute over a decision to relocate 70 branches inside WH Smith stores. The action was called by the Communication Workers' Union, which said that several thousand of its members were involved.

The dispute began in July following an announcement by Royal Mail that Post Office franchises would open in 70 High Street stores, following a trial in six outlets. On July 2, staff at the 85 main post offices took strike action for six hours over the transfer of services to WH Smith stores.

Aer Lingus pilots set to strike in contract dispute

Up to 500 pilots at the Irish airline Aer Lingus are set to strike for two days next week in a dispute over collective agreements. The pilots are members of the IMPACT trade union and the Irish Airline Pilots' Association. They are demanding that Aer Lingus implement collective agreements and the same terms and conditions for pilots at its new Belfast base as those for pilots in the rest of Ireland.

Aer Lingus announced last week that 100 new jobs will be created at Belfast International Airport, but that the employees will not be paid the same rates as staff in the Irish Republic.

In an attempt to weaken any strike action, the airline is currently seeking to enlist the services of other airlines and crews to run services. Reports suggest that Aer Lingus has considered "borrowing" aircraft from the Ryanair airline as a strikebreaking measure. Ryanair owns a 25 percent stake in Aer Lingus.

Social care employees in Glasgow, Scotland, end industrial action

Glasgow social care workers ended their strike action on August 10 after agreeing to accept a new offer from the city council. Some 550 members of the Unison trade union have been involved in a dispute with the council over a salary and grading review since July 24.

The staff voted to accept the deal following a mass meeting. According to the union, most workers will be paid according to a new grade. Further negotiations will be held to discuss "the details on how people will progress beyond the initial salary."

South African university lecturers strike

Around 800 lecturers and academics are on strike at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT—Tshwane was formerly known as Pretoria).

Police constructed a barrier around the administration block on the main campus, where demonstrators had gathered prior to a march. They fired tear gas at students who were demonstrating in support of the strikers.

Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania national president Mametlwe Sebe said, "If management says it will enforce the policy of 'no work, no pay' then students should be reimbursed their tuition fees as well because we paid to get educated. Many student organisations have rallied behind workers and want to go back to their classes."

The National, Education, Health and Allied Workers Union and the National Union of Technikon Employees of South Africa have already made an agreement with the management based upon a pay increase of 7.5 percent together with a one-off payment. However, TUT managers have since said that more than 100 of the staff would not be entitled to the one-off payment, sparking the present dispute.

Auto workers on strike in South Africa

Auto workers at Hi-Tech Automotive, in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, are on strike to demand a reduction in the hours of work from 44 to 40 per week with no loss of pay, equal pay for equal work, better health and safety, and a guaranteed annual bonus.

Workers have complained that the hours of work are unbearable, and that there are wide disparities in income for people doing similar work.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa

(NUMSA) has accused Hi-Tech management of exploiting the workforce and of being anti-union. A NUMSA statement said that Hi-Tech had denied recognition to the union for the past eight years.

South African mining unions at odds, as thousands strike over pay

On August 13, around 3,500 South African miners belonging to the Solidarity union began strike action to demand a 10 percent pay increase for artisans (skilled workers), including boilermakers and electricians.

Mine owners, represented by the Chamber of Mines, have offered 10 percent for the lowest-paid workers and between 7.5 percent and 8.5 percent for skilled workers. This has been accepted by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), which represents the majority of mine workers, and these did not go out on strike.

Solidarity spokesman Jaco Kleynhans blamed the skills shortage in mining on low pay, and said that a 10 percent increase was reasonable because of the “huge growth” in production and profits. He said that the artisans were unhappy about less skilled workers getting 10 percent while they got a smaller percentage.

Zambian hospital workers strike over unpaid allowances

Nurses, paramedics and ancillary staff went on strike at the Ndola Central Hospital and Arthur Davison Hospital on August 10, demanding payment of four months of arrears for their housing allowances and other benefits.

Health minister Brian Chituwo begged the workers to end their strike, while claiming that the majority of workers who had been receiving the allowances were not eligible for them.

Staff at Kitwe Central Hospital decided to call off their two-day protest against delayed payment of housing and other allowances, after union leaders assured them of the government’s intention to pay the arrears.

Ugandan teachers strike over non-payment of salaries

More than 2,000 teachers in Arua, Uganda, went on strike on August 8 to protest not receiving their salary payments for June and July.

The Uganda National Teachers Union chairman in Arua, Mr. Sam Oneti Batia, said, “Teachers cannot continue to stay without their salaries on which they entirely depend, and if we are not paid immediately, we

shall continue with the strike up to the end of the term.”

The District Education Officer, Nicholas Tembo, said the strike was uncalled for, since the outstanding amounts would be paid by August 13. No explanation of the late payments was given in reports of the strike.



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