

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

24 August 2007

Europe

Serbian workers in Šumadija protest plant closure

Thousands of workers from factories and plants from the city of Kragujevac in Serbia staged a demonstration August 22 to support workers at a nearby workplace threatened with closure. Kragujevac is the capital of the Šumadija region.

Several thousands workers participated in the protest outside the municipal building in support of the Zastava Employment and Education (ZZO) workers whose company is scheduled to close by the end of August. The demonstration included workers from the Zastava car, truck and armaments plants, as well as those of the Filip Kljajic and 21 Oktobar plants. The rally was organised by trade unions representing workers at the sites.

Two days prior, 2,000 workers of the 4,412 staff employed by ZZO protested to demand that the plant remain open for a further year in order for negotiations to take place regarding its future.

Economy and Regional Development Minister Mladan Dinkic said this week that workers must accede to the closure plan and accept a severance deal of €250 for every year of service. He also stated that they could then apply for one of the government's self-employment programs.

London Underground staff strike on Bakerloo line in dispute over safety

On August 21, London Underground staff employed on the Bakerloo line struck for 24 hours for the second time this month in a dispute over safety. The workers are members of the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) trade union.

The strike began to protest changes being made by management on the line, which will leave staff working alone as they move passengers from trains at stations north of Queen's Park station. The industrial action was supported by a 94.5 percent majority of RMT members participating in a ballot.

London Underground claimed that the practise was normal across its network. A spokesman stated, "It is normal practice on the Bakerloo line, and across the network, that if two station staff are unavailable to ensure that the train is empty before it is returned to the depot, then the driver will assist."

Union leader Bob Crow rejected this claim and said that it was the RMT's view that "Having a minimum of two station staff involved in detraining passengers is not a luxury, it is a necessity, not least given the levels of crime at the stations involved."

Nippon Express cargo workers strike at Heathrow Airport

On August 14, 45 drivers and warehouse staff employed by the Nippon Express cargo handler at Heathrow Airport in London began strike action in an ongoing dispute over pay and shift working.

The dispute began when Nippon Express offered a below inflation pay award of 2.8 percent to the employees. At the same time the company attempted to impose new shifts and working conditions that the union believes would result in some staff losing over a thousand pounds each year.

The workers are members of the Unite trade union, who claim that the company has reneged on an agreement to settle the dispute at the Arbitration Conciliation and Advisory Service (Acas). The staff walked off the job at 6 a.m. local time following the latest refusal of management to enter into talks with Acas.

On August 17, 37 of the workers began a further two-day strike, again beginning at 6 a.m.

Staff strike at Weatherglaze plant in Wexford, Republic of Ireland

Staff employed at Weatherglaze, a manufacturer of uPVC, timber and aluminium products in Wexford, Republic of Ireland, took strike action on August 16 to protest the sacking of a co-worker who had been employed at the plant for over 24 years.

According to a report in a local newspaper, “staff took action as they felt that their colleague had been treated differently and singled out unnecessarily, prior to his dismissal.”

Following this action by the workforce Weatherglaze management met with a trade union representative and the Labour Relations Commission. The talks resulted in the dismissal being rescinded temporarily and the worker kept on full pay pending an investigation by the commission.

Supply workers strike at Sheffield’s Northern General Hospital

Staff in the bulk stores at Northern General Hospital, Sheffield, struck on August 20. The 24-hour strike is the first at the hospital for more than 30 years.

It came after staff at the sterile supplies production unit, which is facing privatisation, were transferred to the portering department and were told their allowances would be stopped as a result. The Unison trade union said that this amounted to a cut in pay of between £3,000 to £4,000 per annum.

Africa

South African miners end strike

After three days on strike, South African miners belonging to the Solidarity trade union returned to work at midnight on August 15. Solidarity said that the employers had increased their offer for next year by 0.5 percent to 8 percent, but the employers denied that they had made any change to what was offered on August 3.

The NUM, which represents the majority of miners in South Africa, had not taken part in the strike on the grounds that their members were satisfied with the 10 percent offer for the less skilled miners.

Nigerian public sector workers strike over pay

Public sector workers in Kogi state, Nigeria, went on strike August 13 to demand that the state government increases their pay by 15 percent, as promised by the outgoing administration.

The state government has said that unless the workers return to their posts, a policy of “no work, no pay” will be applied. The state government has also claimed that the strike is the result of interference by political opponents, although no proof of this has been given.

Gambian trade unionists detained by security forces

Seven Gambian leaders of the Dock and Maritime Workers Union were detained at the headquarters of the

National Intelligence Agency (NIA) on August 20-21.

According to the FOROYAA newspaper (based in Serrekunda, Gambia), the seven were being leant on to call off the strike planned for September 1. The strike is to address the plans of the Gambia Ports Authority (GPA) for a dock labour scheme in which the dockworkers will become the direct employees of the GPA, and in the process give up many of their rights.

The GPA has been trying to register and recruit on this basis with limited success. The Dock and Maritime Workers Union has proposed a new stevedoring association that would act as an intermediary between the workers and the GPA.



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