

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

21 September 2007

Europe

Danish Broadcasting Corporation staff strike to protest job cuts

On September 12 around 2,000 staff at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), held a one-day strike to protest budget cuts that will lead to hundreds of job losses. Reporters, news broadcasters and about 1,000 production staff involved in the output of both radio and TV programmes fear the cuts will lead to up to 481 redundancies.

The industrial action led to a number of programmes being moved, shortened or cancelled on both September 12 and 13. DR said the cuts were needed as the result of the high costs of building a new headquarters and 50 job losses were announced last week. The company stated that it planned to save 300 million kroner (€40.3 million; US\$55.7 million) a year starting in 2008.

National Museums staff in Liverpool, England strike

Staff at six sites of National Museums Liverpool (NML) took one day-strike action for the third time in two months in a dispute over a below inflation pay offer. NML has imposed a pay deal of 1.8 percent for 2007 and 1.3 percent for 2008—less than half the current rate of inflation.

The 250 conservators, archivists, administration and other specialist staff involved in the dispute are members of the Prospect and Public Commercial Services unions. The employees set up picket lines at six sites in the city—The Walker Art Gallery, World Museum Liverpool, National Conservation Centre, the Maritime Museum, Sudley House, and The Lady Lever Art Gallery in Wirral. The action lasted from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.

Prospect said that the NML imposed the pay offer before a ballot of their membership for industrial action had even been completed.

KLM ground handlers at London Heathrow ballot

for industrial action

Ground handlers at KLM Ground Services (KGS) employed at Heathrow Airport in London began voting in a ballot for strike action this week. The 76 workers are members of the Unite trade union and are involved in an ongoing dispute with the company over their shift payments being calculated on a seasonal basis. According to the union this will mean a £30 a month reduction in pay or the equivalent of a 2.12 percent pay cut.

The trade union said the decision by the company was a breach of a long-standing agreement, which included shift pay in the overall wages of staff. Unite has called on the KGS to discuss the dispute at the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, which it has refused to do. The average pay of a ground handler at KGS is £17,000 per annum. The ballot result is set to be announced after October 4.

Africa

Nigeria: civil servants strike action

Civil servants in the north-eastern state of Adamawa began indefinite strike action Friday, September 14. The strike follows three weeks of negotiations, which broke down.

Government workers responded to the call by the Joint Public Service Negotiating Council to begin the indefinite action. The strike led to closure of many government offices throughout the state, with only a small number of high-ranking civil servants trying to provide a skeleton service in government offices in the state capital, Yola.

The strikers' demands are for a 15 percent salary increase, an end to excessive taxation of civil servants' salaries and for newly employed civil servants to receive their salary. The new state government had suspended salary payments to newly hired civil servants.

The strikers have rejected a 10 percent salary increase offer by the government. Union leaders meeting in

Yola on September 17 issued a statement. They said, “Despite the constitution of a new committee headed by the deputy governor to negotiate the 15 percent consolidated salary increase, up to this very moment the two sides have not yet agreed on the basis of negotiations.”

The chairman of the Joint Public Service Negotiating Council, Mohammed Tuki, said the workers will not return until their demands are met in full. Civil servants in the south-western Oyo state took strike action at the end of August in pursuit of a wages claim.

South African auto components strike

A strike by nearly 30,000 workers who produce automotive components has brought production to a halt at most of South Africa’s car plants.

The workers belonging to the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) began their strike September 12 after wage negotiations with the Retail Motor Industry (RMI) broke down. Volkswagen, DaimlerChrysler, Nissan and Toyota have had to close or cut down production because of a shortage of components. Spokespersons for the industry warned of South Africa’s reputation as an exporter of cars being hit if the strike continued.

VW South Africa managing director David Powels threatened that 1,500 jobs at the company’s plant and 3,500 in the industry would go if the strike continued. “Without export business, the vehicle and component manufacturing industry in South Africa will collapse,” he said.

Pickets were attacked by police at the Johnson Matthey factory in Germiston on the East Rand. Some 16 people were injured when police fired rubber bullets at protesting workers.

NUMSA is demanding a pay rise of 9 percent and the employers are offering 8.5 percent. It is expected that intense negotiations over the next day or two will lead to a deal. The employers have put forward a new package, with increases varying from 8.5 to 10 percent for different grades. RMI executive director Jakkie Olivier said, “We are close to each other now on all major issues and the union has requested to take the new proposal to its members.”

Some 20,000 businesses are affected by the strike with the smaller companies claiming they are unable to afford the NUMSA pay demand.



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