

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

19 October 2007

## Europe

### UK Cadbury workers to ballot for strike action

The union Unite is to ballot workers at Cadbury's on industrial action over the closure of a factory.

Around 500 jobs will be lost when the plant at Keynsham closes from 2009 onwards. More than 100 workers from the plant planned to join other union members to protest about the cuts at a rally in London October 17.

Unions and company managers have already met to discuss the possible closure of the Bournville factory in Birmingham, where 200 jobs are under threat. A protest rally against the plans, involving around 200 people, was held earlier in October.

Part of the Keynsham production is scheduled to be moved to factories in Poland.

### BBC staff prepare to strike over job cuts

Unions representing BBC workers have warned that a strike is inevitable within weeks if the director general, Mark Thompson, presses ahead with plans to lay off 2,000 employees—almost a tenth of the workforce.

The move is part of a £2 billion budget cut, following the government's decision to sanction a much reduced licence fee settlement.

BBC journalists and production staff gathered outside Broadcasting House in London on October 17 to lobby BBC Trust members as they arrived for a meeting to finalise plans to plug the funding shortfall. The action came as BBC inside sources said they believe management will call for staff to take voluntary redundancies on October 19.

The cuts by BBC management have also drawn criticism from senior broadcasters such as John Humphrys and Jeremy Paxman for their decision to reduce news and current affairs.

Thompson is expected to appeal to the BBC Trust, which replaced the board of governors, to stand firm in the face of sustained strike action.

According to the *Telegraph*, a senior broadcaster,

who declined to be named, predicted a furious response from even the most moderate employees to the compulsory redundancies among the 23,000 workforce. "There will be a strike. That is definite," he said. "Some big programmes will go off the air.... Management have a big fight on their hands."

A senior BBC journalist said, "It's going to be a bloodbath and strike action is certain. People who have been at the BBC for years are going to lose their jobs, which will really stir up the militant feeling pervading the organisation."

The biggest cuts planned over the next six years are in the 3,000-strong news gathering operation when radio, television and online operations are integrated for the first time. Several hundred jobs will also go in the BBC's factual division, responsible for programmes such as "Planet Earth."

Hundreds more staff will be redeployed and an embargo is to be imposed on recruitment, unless sanctioned by the highest authority.

### Turkey: 26,000 telecommunication workers go on strike

On October 16, about 26,000 workers at Turkish telecommunication company Turk Telekom went on an indefinite strike after collective bargaining negotiations collapsed. Union representatives (Union of Post Office Telegraph, Telephone, Radio and Television Workers and Employees of Turkey—Haber-Is) have been in discussions with the company since May 29. This is the first strike in the history of the company.

In 2005, Oger Telecom bought a 55 percent stake in the company for \$6.55 billion, with the rest still remaining with the state. Oger Telecom is a subsidiary of Saudi Oger, a Saudi Arabian conglomerate controlled by relatives of Rafiq Hariri, the late Lebanese prime minister.

During negotiations, management refused to discuss what the union described as "basic and indispensable demands" regarding workers' employment conditions.

Union president Ali Akcan said Telekom administration refused to accept their proposals, stating that wage talks collapsed because of this.

As soon as the strike kicked off Paul Doany, CEO of Turk Telekom, declared in a press release, “No employee should expect an increase above the inflation rate.”

There are 23 articles of the collective agreement subject to disagreement and four of them are regarding wages.

Soon after the privatisation of Turk Telekom, Haber-Is lost nearly one third of its members and the percentage of non-unionised workers within the company has been steadily increasing since.

Turk Telekom is a very profitable company and last year ranked as number one in corporate taxes paid.

### **Africa**

#### **Council workers on strike in Sierra Leone over non-payment**

Council workers employed by Bo City Council (BCC) in Bo Town, Sierra Leone, are on strike to demand payment of their salaries for the last three months.

One of the strikers told the *Concord Times* that they would continue the strike until they received their salaries. “I am yet to pay the school fees of my three children and they are in secondary schools,” Lahai Kallon explained.

Another said that they had held off from striking while the elections were on, but could do so no longer. “We will take to the streets of Bo Town if our concerns remain unaddressed,” she said, accusing the council of inhuman treatment of its employees.

The mayor of Bo Town blamed problems inherited from his predecessors for the backlog.

#### **Liberian social workers stage go-slow against new management**

Social workers employed by the National Social Security & Welfare Corporation (NASSCORP) have been staging a go-slow to oppose the changes made by its current head, Francis Carbah.

Carbah is said to have withdrawn several benefits for employees, including rice, housing benefit and transportation allowance. At the same time, he has increased his own salary from US\$2,600 to US\$4,300, while keeping his employees’ salaries fixed, according to the *Analyst*, a newspaper based in the capital

Monrovia. Carbah also receives US\$3,000 just for being a member of the NASSCORP board, and gets thousands more as expenses, such as the US\$18,000 he claimed while traveling in Europe.

The 200 employees who gathered outside the NASSCORP offices shouted, “No benefits, no work, we don’t want Carbah.”

#### **Kenyan ranch workers strike over poor working conditions**

Around 200 workers on a private ranch at Segera in Laikipia East District are on strike in protest at their poor conditions of work and low pay.

A guard at the ranch said that he and his colleagues had to work at night wearing nothing warmer than T-shirts. “The manager says we should not wear warm clothes lest we fall asleep. We also work on Sundays and during public holidays and we are not compensated for the extra working hours,” he told the *Nation* newspaper.

Labour officers have been prevented from performing an inspection of the ranch when they have visited. The ranch rears thousands of beef cattle, as well as wildlife.



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