

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

26 October 2007

Europe

Coventry journalists work-to-rule over staffing levels

Journalists working for the *Coventry Telegraph* are carrying out a work-to-rule and could hold a 24-hour strike in a dispute over staffing levels.

According to *Press Gazette*, the members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) at the paper “are aggrieved that staff numbers have dwindled in recent years after journalists’ jobs were lost through redundancy schemes and not replaced.”

The *Coventry Telegraph* has 11 reporters, which the union says is far too low. Until the action is resolved staff will withdraw “goodwill,” such as missing breaks and working unpaid overtime. Talks between staff and union officials and the conciliation service ACAS in August failed to reach an agreement.

Workers at UK paper mill take action over pay parity

Thirty-eight contract workers for TDG (formerly called Transport Development Group) at a Kimberly-Clark paper mill in Northfleet, Kent, staged a series of one-day strikes on October 12, 23 and 24.

The workers, represented by Unite, are involved in a dispute is over lack of parity in 2007 pay raises between Kimberly-Clark workers at Northfleet, also members of Unite, and the TDG workers. In previous years, the company has matched raises that Kimberly-Clark workers received.

Fourth strike day at Liverpool city museums and galleries

Over 250 staff at Liverpool’s museums and galleries staged their fourth one-day strike on October 20 in a dispute over pay agreements.

Conservators and administrators as well as archivists and other specialist staff are involved in the dispute. The workers say an imposed pay offer is less than half the rate of inflation.

According to the BBC, six sites of National Museums Liverpool (NML) were affected by the one-day strike, which is the fourth in three months.

Air France cabin crew unions call five-day strike

Unions representing cabin crew at Air France called a five-day strike to press management to review salary and working conditions, trade union sources told *Reuters* on October 22.

“There is a strike notice from October 25 to October 29 included. All unions are taking part in it, which is a first at Air France,” a union source said.

The sources said unions were trying to pressure management into renegotiating an agreement on salaries and working conditions that will expire at the end of 2007. “People are very motivated because some salaries have been frozen for 10 years, and working conditions have been affected to help the company recover. The company is now doing extremely well and we do not see the benefits of that,” added one source.

A spokeswoman for Air France-KLM, the world’s largest airline by revenue, said a meeting between management and union representatives took place October 22.

Disruption at Air France would follow a nationwide strike over pensions which severely affected train, metro and bus transport across France last week. Separately, Air France flights from the Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris were delayed on the morning of October 22 because of a strike by baggage handlers.

Middle East

Israeli prime minister attacks high school teachers’ strike

According to *Ha’aretz*, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert called October 24 for an end to the high school teachers strike, which has entered its third week, and denounced the head of the Secondary School Teachers Association (SSTA), Ran Erez.

During his visit to Paris, Olmert told reporters, “This is

a superfluous and utterly unjustified strike. I call on the teachers to stop the strike immediately, and on the secretary of the teachers organisation to stop the sanctions, which are hurting the students and the status of teachers in Israel.”

As of October 24, no new talks had been scheduled with the striking teachers.

Erez called his own press conference in Tel Aviv October 23, where he said, “We have an obligation to cry out that the future of the education system, and of the students, is in great danger. Even if the Finance Ministry were to offer a 15 percent raise, but did not also promise to reduce the number of students per class, we would not agree.”

He said that teachers were to hold a series of demonstrations and meetings in the coming days with the goal of “explaining the strike” to parents “so that everyone will understand that the struggle is not just over a raise, but over the future of Israeli education. This is a battle for the welfare state and reducing [social] gaps.”

Erez said the union plans to file a complaint with the United Nations about the deteriorating education system, and to inform overseas Jewish donors “that the government is not making proper use of the money they donate—namely, by investing in education.”

The treasury’s wage director, Eli Cohen, accused the SSTA of seeking to thwart the reforms agreed to by the Teachers Union, which represents elementary school teachers.

Africa

Namibian electricity workers strike over pay

Employees of the Namibian electricity company Erongo Red (E-Red) have been on strike over pay. The workers are members of the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN), and have been demanding a 9.5 percent rise, as opposed to the 7 percent offered by management.

The strike started on October 18, and continued until October 22. The agreement at the end of the dispute was for a 7 percent salary increase, plus transport and electricity subsidies of N\$300 (US\$2.50) and N\$350 (US\$2.92) respectively.

On the first day of the strike, a large crowd of E-Red employees gathered outside the company headquarters in Walvis Bay, calling for CEO Gerhard Coeln to come out and face them over their grievances. Coeln had threatened employees with disciplinary action if the strike led to the disruption of electricity supplies. The company said the strike had cost it N\$1 million (US\$150,000).

Thousands of South African coalminers on strike

More than 2,000 South African coalminers employed by Sasol Mining went on strike on October 12 in a dispute over wages. The strikers are members of the United People’s Union of South Africa (UPUSA), and make up more than a third of the total workforce. UPUSA said that the correct figure for those out on strike was over 3,500.

UPUSA said that their members were paid poorly in comparison with workers represented by the Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union.

Negotiations stalled when the company said it had made its final offer, but the union said it was not enough. Sasol said it had enough stockpiles of coal to continue its other operations without coal from its mines in Mpumalanga province.

Sasol is the world’s biggest producer of fuel from coal.

Nigerian dockworkers stop work to protest bad conditions

Nigerian dockworkers stopped work at the Lagos seaports on October 18 to protest their poor working conditions.

The workers barricaded the entrances to the ports in the early hours of the morning. They carried placards describing some of the difficulties they have to face. One said, “No to 12 hours working period (per shift).” Another complained, “A working environment without conditions of service is 21st century slavery.”

The president general of the Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria, (MWUN), Onikolease Irabor, said that “before a dockworker enters their premises, they first of all collect his mobile phone and make him incommunicado, just like you will have in a slave camp.”



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