

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

4 April 2008

Europe

Postal workers strike in Germany

Postal workers in Germany took industrial action this week. The Deutsche Post employees are seeking to ensure that their current protection against redundancies is upheld until 2011 and that their working week remains at 38.5 hours. They are also calling for a pay increase of around 7 percent. Management at the postal service are seeking to increase the working week to 41 hours.

The “warning strike” involved some 5,000 workers and resulted in 6 million letters not being delivered in 14 major German cities.

Postal workers took further industrial action in southern Germany on April 2. According to the Verdi public sector trade union, some 2,200 postal workers struck and mail distribution centres in the states of Bavaria and Hesse were closed as part of the action.

Secondary school teachers in France protest proposed job losses

French secondary school teachers have been involved in a series of strikes over the past week to oppose plans to slash up to 11,200 teaching jobs at the beginning of the next school year and proposed cuts in the education budget.

The National Secondary Teachers Union (SNES) called a strike that was held on March 27 in the school district of Créteil, near Paris. According to the Education International web site www.ei-ie.org, education trade unions held a March 26 meeting of some 120 educators representing about 50 schools in 12 local education districts.

The strike follows a previous stoppage by secondary school teachers on March 18.

The unions also planned to hold strike action this week and announced that the SNES will meet with members of parliament and the Ministry of Education for discussions.

National Museum Wales employees strike in pay dispute

On April 3, employees of the National Museum Wales staged their first strike in more than a century in a pay

dispute. The workers are members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS).

National Museum Wales has offered an average below-inflation pay increase of between 0 and 2 percent, according to the union. The museum claimed that the pay rise worked out at an average of 4.9 percent.

The stoppage forced the closure of seven of the museum’s sites—the National Museum, Cardiff; National History Museum, St. Fagans; National Slate Museum, Llanberis; National Roman Legion Museum, Caerleon; Big Pit: National Coal Museum in Blaenavon; National Waterfront Museum in Swansea; and the National Wool Museum in Drefach Felindre.

Glasgow Caledonian University lecturers oppose partnership plan

On April 1, lecturers at Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland held a rally to oppose management plans to work with a private company to recruit overseas students.

The university is organising a partnership with the educational company INTO, which already has deals with universities in Exeter, East Anglia and Newcastle. Under the terms of the agreement, a new “international foundation college” would be founded at Caledonian, offering preparatory courses for undergraduate and postgraduate study in Scotland.

Lecturers fear that the move will result in privatisation. Nick McKerrell, the convenor of the Glasgow Caledonian combined union committee, said this week that £500,000 of public money would be invested in the proposed college: “This is privatisation of a core service of our university. Teaching and recruiting students is what we do. Why are we giving a blank cheque to a private company to do this?”

Secondary school teachers in Britain vote to strike over pay

Members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) in Britain voted this week in favour of industrial action. The strike is centred on the issue of pay after teachers rejected a below-inflation offer of 2.45 percent.

The union represents 200,000 and is the largest

teachers' union in the UK. Teachers voted to strike for 24 hours on April 24, with 75.2 percent in favour. The ballot turnout was low, with just 32 percent of teachers participating.

Were the industrial action to proceed, it would be the first national teachers' strike in state schools for 21 years. The action is expected to result in the closure of hundreds of schools. The NUT announced this week that if the dispute is not resolved, further industrial action would be scheduled for the summer and autumn.

An NUT statement said that the pay offer "represents yet another pay cut for teachers on top of those to which teachers have been subjected in 2005, 2006 and 2007. The most vulnerable teachers, those new to the profession, will suffer most."

Africa

Kenyan council workers suspended for going on strike

Seventy-three workers employed by Nairobi City Council have been suspended after taking part in a strike to demand payment of Sh492 million (US\$8.2 million) of salary arrears. The arrears have been unpaid for up to five months.

The workers also organised a protest outside the Nairobi City Hall, demanding that all the chief officers who had reached the age for retirement be replaced immediately. They claimed there were plans to cut jobs, and that council leaders were only waiting for a suitable pretext. Denying reports that they were owed only three months' salary arrears, the strikers explained that a few people had received their salaries for two months but that most were still waiting.

The suspensions were made the day after the strike was ended by the intervention of the Kenya Local Government Workers' Union, which advised that a return to work would allow arbitration to take place to address the workers' complaints.

Striking Ghanaian railway workers prepare to return to work

After almost two months on strike to demand payment of salary arrears, most of the striking Ghanaian railway workers are expected to return to work today.

Management have offered assurances that they will not be victimised, and a "memorandum of understanding" has been signed with the union. This contains a commitment to pay the arrears, but it is also a promise to speed up "the privatisation process."

The Chairman of the Interim Committee of the union had been served with a summons by the National Labour

Commission (NLC) to appear in court, in spite of the union having convinced the workers to return to work.

The workers have been on strike since February to demand improved conditions of service, a 150 percent pay increase and immediate payment of all salary arrears.

Museum workers on strike in Sierra Leone over pay arrears

Workers at the Sierra Leone Museum in Freetown and the National Railway Museum at Clinetown are on strike to demand payment of 11 months of salary arrears.

The government has blamed its predecessors for creating the problem. The Permanent Secretary of Tourism and Culture told the *Independent* (Freetown) that they had plans to clear the salary arrears, but no details were given.

Gabonese oil workers return to work after two-week strike

Employees of Shell Gabon returned to work at the beginning of April after a two-week strike. Their union, the National Organisation of Petroleum Workers (ONEP), contended that most of their demands had been met.

An inquiry into conditions in the oil industry will be carried out by the Labour Minister in the government of President Omar Bongo.

The union had demanded that any hours worked over 42 per week be paid at overtime rates. Reports since the strike ended have been unclear on whether this demand had been met.

In addition to stopping Shell Gabon's own oil production, output at France's Total Gabon and Perenco were also hit by the strike due to shared pipelines.

Gabon produced 232,000 barrels of oil a day in 2006, according to statistics from BP. Around 26 percent of the total normally comes from Shell Gabon, 75 percent of which is owned by Royal Dutch Shell.



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