

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

25 April 2008

## **UK: teachers and civil servants strike larger than predicted**

Reports indicate that the number of schools affected by strike action taken by teachers on April 24 was far more than the 8,000 predicted.

According to the *Guardian*, “Key local authorities reported double the number turning pupils away.” In a number of major cities, such as Liverpool, Birmingham and Bristol, as well as London boroughs like Camden, predictions for school closures were “vastly underestimated.”

The actual effects of the strike could far outweigh the one million children who were thought to be off school. In Liverpool alone the number of schools closed or partially closed went up from a predicted 67 yesterday to 135 confirmed. In Birmingham the number more than tripled, with almost 250 schools in the city closed or turning some pupils away.

Seven more authorities across the country reported a higher number of schools were affected than they predicted.

Thousands of strikers attended a rally in London.

Over 100,000 civil servants—from driving test supervisors to coastguards—and 30,000 college lecturers were also out on strike.

## **Germany: Postal workers hold strike**

German postal workers began staging warning strikes on April 21 over a pay dispute with Deutsche Post.

The dispute involves 130,000 workers across Germany. The strikes took place in a number of major cities including Berlin, Hamburg, Stuttgart, Hanover and Dresden. Approximately 3 million letters went undelivered, according to the trade union Verdi.

Although warning strikes in Germany have usually involved temporary stoppages, postal workers are to vote on April 25 for full strike action from May 2 following the breakdown of wage talks with Deutsche Post last week.

Deutsche Post has offered a wage increase over two years of 5.5 percent in combination with 3.5 more working hours per week. The union is demanding a 7 percent wage increase and a job guarantee through to June 2011.

## **Sweden: nurses strike in pay dispute**

Around 2,500 Swedish nurses, midwives, radiographers and laboratory assistants went on strike this week after wage negotiations failed.

Hospitals across the country are expected to cancel dozens of non-emergency operations. Some emergency rooms will also

shut.

The health union is demanding a minimum wage for nurses of 22,000 kronor (US\$3,700; €2,340) a month. Public health authorities have refused, instead proposing a minimum wage of 21,100 kronor (US\$3,550, €2,240).

## **Ireland: Guinness brewery workers could take first strike in 250 years**

Employees at the Irish brewery, Guinness, started voting on industrial action April 21. The workers’ response could include an all-out strike at Dublin’s St. James’s Gate brewery for the first time in its 250-year history.

The Guinness Staff Union (GSU) confirmed that it will ballot members on industrial action in a dispute about redundancy terms.

The GSU is the largest trade union at the company, and represents 800 staff in Dublin, Kilkenny, Waterford and Dundalk.

According to the *Belfast Telegraph*, a spokesman said union members were angry at the revision of redundancy terms and that the company had refused to enter into negotiations on the changes.

A recent ballot of GSU members overwhelmingly rejected the revised redundancy terms by 98 percent to 2 percent. The balloting process is expected to take around three weeks and the GSU executive will then meet to consider workers’ response and decide what action to take.

Fears for up to 300 jobs have been expressed from a reorganisation of the company, meaning a possible closure of some or all of Guinness’s Kilkenny, Waterford and Dundalk breweries, whose production includes Budweiser, Carlsberg, Smithwicks and Harp.

It has been predicted that an all-out strike at St. James’s Gate would have a crippling effect on Guinness production. The historic brewery operates at close to maximum capacity the year round, supplying to Ireland, Britain, North America and internationally. Guinness sales are up 6 percent in Ireland and 15 percent worldwide. Last month, beverage distributor Diageo reported half-yearly profits of almost €1.8 billion.

## **France: Port workers strike**

Port workers employed in seven of France’s biggest ports went on strike April 23 to protest against government plans to sell dock equipment and allow private companies to take staff off public payrolls.

The Fos and Lavera terminals at the Marseille port, the

biggest in the country, shut down, leaving 67 vessels including 39 tankers stranded at the harbour entrance.

A number of ships were reported blocked at France's largest container port, Le Havre.

The strikes come as the ports plan was presented at the French cabinet ministers' meeting. Union officials have said that the ports plan, to be submitted to parliament before the summer, may threaten jobs.

The CGT has called for strikes three nights a week and an end to overtime work. Ports will be blocked during the nights of April 24 and 25, it said. Le Havre will be closed for 24 hours starting midday on May 26.

The union sent a letter to President Nicolas Sarkozy April 17 saying that there was "no real economic and financial necessity" for the new plan.

#### **Postal strike in the Netherlands**

*DutchNews* reported that TNT postal workers began industrial action for higher wages April 23, with a strike by hundreds of delivery staff in The Hague.

According to the AbvaKabo union, 80 percent of the 500 employees in the city failed to turn up for work, ANP news service reports. TNT delivery staff in Amsterdam will go on strike April 25. Negotiations between TNT and the unions were abandoned earlier this month. The unions want a 3.5 percent rise backdated from April 1 this year, but the employers are only prepared to offer 1.5 percent now and 1.5 percent in April 2009.

#### **Nigerian telecom workers strike**

Workers at Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL) began an all-out nationwide strike on April 15 in protest against the non-implementation of an agreement reached with the National Union of Postal and Telecommunications Employees (NUPTE) on April 1. The industrial action has completely shut down the company's network.

Following negotiations on five months' outstanding salary arrears, an agreement had been reached for a month's salary to be paid on April 14 with another month's salary to be paid by the end of April. When the company failed to make the first payment, the workers responded by taking strike action.

Before the strike, workers shut down the landing points of the undersea cable (SAT-3), which connects Nigeria with the rest of the world. This action cut communications to and from the presidential villa, the State Security Service office, the aviation sector and more than 10 private telecoms operators.

Nigeria's telecommunications regulatory agency, the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), has issued a statement on the strike, alerting the nation to what it calls the "grave implications" for the country's security. It warned of the economic and security implication of the strike, pointing out that NITEL provides major landline services to many government agencies and major corporations in the country.

NUPTE Acting President Julius Abure told *Vanguard* (Lagos) that workers across the country at NITEL and its

subsidiary, MTE, decided to take their destiny into their own hands after the management of NITEL refused to even respond to the ultimatums from both the junior workers' body and that of the senior staff association.

The striking workers have declared that they are planning to continue their action until management pays them their five months' salary arrears and other allowances.

NITEL is the main Nigerian telecoms company and was publicly owned until it was sold to Transcorp. The unions accuse the Transcorp management of asset stripping since taking over the company.

#### **Kenyan telecom workers on go-slow and threatening to strike**

Telecom workers in Kenya are staging a go-slow to protest the 10 percent pay increase being offered by Telkom Kenya after talks between the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and management collapsed on April 10.

The CWU is threatening to call a strike in support of its demand for a 202 percent increase. The union points out that the increase was initially recommended four years ago by Price WaterHouse Coopers, after an assessment that led to 15,000 workers being made redundant.

Benson Okwaro, chairman of the CWU, admitted that the union had accepted the "retrenchment" in the hope that the 3,030 remaining would have better pay.

#### **Mauritanian teachers strike over poverty pay**

Mauritanian secondary school teachers began a three-day strike on April 17, to protest the deadlock in pay negotiations and their desperately low pay of 65,000 ouguiya (US\$260) per year. Ninety-five percent of secondary schools were affected on the first day of the strike.

The Trade Union of Secondary Education Teachers has pointed out that current salaries meet less than 30 percent of teachers' basic needs.



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