

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

13 June 2008

## Europe

### **Rail workers and public sector staff strike in France**

On June 10, French railway employees and other public sector staff staged industrial action in opposition to government plans to cut jobs in education, transport and other workplaces.

The government of President Nicolas Sarkozy is seeking to slash the budget deficit and plans to shed thousands of public sector jobs. Some 5.2 million employees in France are currently employed by the state. The government has unveiled plans to implement more than 23,000 job cuts.

Workers represented by three railway trade unions began a 24-hour stoppage at 8 p.m. local time. The workers are employed by the state rail company SNCF and are protesting government plans to introduce more-flexible hours of work and increasing competition from private firms. SNCF also plans to merge its freight firms into a single division with its own drivers and personnel by the end of 2008. Railway workers fear that this measure may lead to 6,000 job losses by 2010. Since 2004, some 8,000 railway freight workers have already lost their jobs.

During the strike, trains on the RER B suburban line connecting Charles de Gaulle airport and Paris were limited to one every 15 minutes. High-speed TGV Atlantique trains connecting Paris and Bordeaux in southwest France, and the TGV Sud Est, connecting Grenoble in the southeast, ran about three quarters of its scheduled services during the strike. High-speed trains running from Marseille to Lille were only operating at 50 percent of scheduled services during the action.

According to government figures, the public sector strike was supported by about 5 percent of workers, compared to about 25 percent for a similar day of action last month.

The CGT trade union openly acknowledged that it had refused to organise a large-scale strike and protest against the government. Didier Le Reste, the general secretary of the CGT union, said, "The conditions were not right for a

large mobilisation".

### **Danish nursing workers' strike enters eighth week**

At least 8,000 Danish nurses remain on national strike action. The dispute has now entered its eighth week after the Danish Nurses' Union (DSR) walked out of negotiations with management over pay. During that period, 350,000 operations have been cancelled with only emergency operations and treatment on life-threatening conditions going ahead.

According to reports, the nurses' union rejected a pay offer of a 14.3 percent increase over the next three years. The union is demanding a pay rise of 15 percent. The dispute began after management had offered an initial pay settlement of 12.8 percent.

Demands have been made from within both health employers and government circles for the government to step in and end the strike. On June 6, Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen warned that if the government intervenes to end the dispute, then nurses would have the 12.8 percent deal forced upon them.

### **German tourist workers in pay dispute**

On June 11, hundreds of tourist staff employed by TUI in Germany staged a warning strike to demand a pay increase. The action was called by the Verdi trade union. The union is demanding a retroactive pay increase of €120 (US\$186) a month, to July 2007, and another increase of €150 from July 2008. Verdi is also seeking a 12-month contract while the tourist industry is demanding an 18-month contract.

The union claimed that the 3 percent pay deal that staff received from April 2008 represented a below-inflation deal.

Some 70,000 workers are employed in tourism in Germany, and talks between tourist industry management and the trade union ended without agreement in January. Further negotiations regarding an industry-wide settlement are scheduled for June 24.

### **Bus drivers in Holland continue industrial action**

Bus drivers in Holland continued strike action in the central and southern regions of the country this week. The

drivers are striking in a dispute over pay and are organised in the FNV trade union.

The workers continued the stoppage despite an anti-strike legal judgement covering the regions of Friesland, Groningen and Drenthe. On June 10, judges in Groningen stated that the strike was “socially disruptive” during the rush-hour period and ordered all drivers in those areas of the country to return to work. Under the ruling, buses in the three regions will only operate between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. and between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. The trade unions face a fine of €10,000 a day if they do not comply.

The court in Groningen also ruled that the unions and employers had to resume pay talks. It ruled that if an agreement were not reached by August 12, all-out strike action, including during the rush hour, would again be permitted.

### **Museum of London archaeology staff strike in pay dispute**

Curators, archaeologists, technical specialists and managers employed by the Museum of London took strike action on June 9 to protest the delayed 2007-2008 pay award. The staff are protesting as the pay deal is now 13 months late and the museum is offering a settlement at half the rate of inflation.

The action was the first ever taken by staff in the museum’s archaeology service and resulted in the closure of at least 10 archaeological sites based in London. The workers are members of the Prospect trade union and picketed outside the museum on London Wall from 8 a.m. local time.

Prospect negotiator Dave Allen said of the dispute, “Today’s strike demonstrates the strength of feeling among our 200 members at the museum, not only over a derisory pay offer, but against the stranglehold of the Treasury which is preventing the museum from offering a fair reward to retain the specialist staff it relies on.”

## **Africa**

### **Teachers strike in Nigeria**

Teachers in many of the states in Nigeria went out on a three-day strike June 11 to demand the introduction of a separate salary scale.

The Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) said that the dispute over the salary structure had been going on since 1991. Nigeria has more than a million teachers within the state school system.

In Kano state, the recently registered teachers’ organisation, the Academic Staff Union of Secondary Schools (ASUSS), labeled the strike illegal and refused to join it, saying it had not been consulted before the strike

started. The strike is taking place at the time of examinations for some students. The unions representing the strikers advised the authorities to reschedule the exams.

### **Senegalese and Malian teachers strike against falling living standards**

Teachers in Senegal in West Africa are on strike over their low pay. A Senegalese primary school teacher currently gets FCFA 100,000 (US\$238) per month. The cost of living in Senegal is 24 percent above the African average, according to figures from the World Bank.

Teachers in Mali are also out on strike, demanding that the government give them a US\$142 housing allowance, calling for a rise in contract teachers’ salaries and for salaries to increase each year as teachers remain in the system.

Although Malian teachers’ pay increases every year in line with other state-sector workers, their pay grades do not. Qualified teachers who are not state certified receive lower salaries than those who are government qualified; they are also unable to participate in teacher training.

### **Dozens of striking local government workers injured by police in South Africa**

So many striking local government workers have been injured by Ekurhuleni police that the courts have now issued an order telling them to stop shooting at the strikers unless acting in “self defence.”

South African Municipal Workers Union (Samwu) issued a statement saying, “Dozens of Samwu members have been injured by the trigger-happy Ekurhuleni metro police department since the beginning of the strike two weeks ago, with at least one worker having spent time in intensive care this week.”

The strike, involving 8,000 workers, has now entered its third week. On Monday, the municipality served the union with an ultimatum demanding that all employees carrying out essential services return to work. By law, essential service workers in the health service, the emergency services, electricity services, etc., are not allowed to take part in strike action.



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