

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

20 June 2008

Europe

French state broadcasting staff strike

On June 18, most of the programming on state-run TV and radio broadcasts in France was cancelled or delayed due to a 24-hour strike by employees. The workers are members of 10 trade unions.

The action was called to protest plans workers fear will lead to less funding for state broadcasting and help to strengthen private broadcasters.

Workers from France Television, Radio France, Radio France Internationale, the National Audiovisual Institute and international broadcaster TV5 Monde were involved in the action. Up to 4,000 took part in a demonstration against the planned measures in Paris.

Germany: Daimler AG strike over pension rights

Hundreds of employees at Daimler AG's largest plant in Germany took strike action for two hours on June 18 to protest attacks on their early-retirement scheme.

The 800 workers are members of the IG Metall trade union and are employed at the sheet-metal pressing and body-shell work facilities in Sindelfingen. The current state subsidies for early-retirement schemes are scheduled to expire at the end of 2009. The union held negotiations for a fifth time with the Suedwestmetall employer representative group this week regarding the dispute.

Workers continue hunger strike at tungsten plant in Russia

This week, 19 workers joined a hunger strike at a tungsten production plant in the Russian far east to demand the payment of unpaid wages. The workers at a plant in the village of Svetlogorye have not been paid for three months and joined four workers who were already striking. Sixteen of the hunger strikers are women. On June 16, one was taken to hospital with high blood pressure.

The employees claim that they are owed about 2.7 million rubles (approximately US\$120,000) in unpaid wages. The 300 workers at the plant were last paid in February. Their wages range from 6,000 to 10,000 rubles (about US\$300-US\$430) per month.

The Russian news agency Novosti reported a regional Federation of Trade Unions official, Margarita Usova, saying, "The situation is critical, people have been surviving on last year's crops from their vegetable gardens."

According to another report, the owner of the plant, Russkiy Volfram, said that wages are unlikely to be paid until August.

Metalworkers strike to demand new health and safety laws in Italy

Metalworkers throughout Italy struck for one hour on June 17 to demand the implementation of new laws on health and safety at work. The workers are members of three trade unions.

The action was in opposition to the employers' association, Confindustria, which the unions say has not ensured safety standards. The strike follows the deaths of a number of workers over the past period, included seven workers who died at the ThyssenKrupp plant in Turin in December.

Workers strike at Tuzla shipyards in Turkey to protest deaths at work

Turkish shipyard workers staged a one-day strike on June 14 to demand better safety and working conditions. The strike was held in the Tuzla district of Istanbul and was called by the Harbour, Shipyard and Ship Construction and Repair Workers' Union.

During the day, hundreds of shipyard workers demonstrated outside the Tuzla Shipyard and were supported by several thousand other workers and members of political parties.

The shipyard employees are calling for a 7.5-hour working day and 37.5-hour working week, for an infirmary to be provided, and for their insurance to be paid by the main company employing the subcontractor.

Over the past 11 months, 25 workers have been killed in accidents in the Tuzla district. According to the *Zaman* newspaper, "More than 50 fatal accidents have occurred in the last seven years, largely due to electrical shocks and falls from platforms."

In May, two workers died due to work-related accidents at the Selah Shipyard in Tuzla within the space of eight days.

The latest death occurred on June 8. Ihsan Turhan, 35, was killed after being crushed by a steel plate weighing hundreds of kilograms.

Many of the 45,000 workers at the Tuzla Shipyards are employed by subcontracting companies. An estimated 90 percent of the work at the yards has been outsourced. Many regularly work 13- to 14-hour days in an environment where safety precautions are routinely bypassed.

Africa

Namibian college lecturers determined to strike

College lecturers in Namibia were determined to begin their indefinite strike action over pay on June 17, in spite of their union being silent on whether or not it was going to call the strike officially or not.

Liswani Simasiku, spokesperson for the group, told *New Era*, “Come hell or high water we will continue with the strike, all the academic staff have voted for an industrial action.”

The lecturers’ representatives complain that their grading and salary scales are too low and should be brought into line with those of university lecturers. Their grievances date back to 2003. The deadline set by the lecturers passed on June 13, without any sign from the Namibian government that their demands were to be addressed.

Mauritian workers on strike after not being paid

Le Mauricien newspaper reported that nearly 100 employees of Super Construction Ltd. were on strike in Mauritius. The workers, of Chinese origin, had not been paid for three months. The company is based in Tour Koenig, just outside the capital Port Louis.

Reuters reported that many such strikes have been taking place on the island “over issues like pay, overtime, and even dormitory water supply.”

Mauritius has around 22,000 foreign workers, half of whom are Chinese, according to official statistics.

Nurses work to rule in Botswana

Nurses in Botswana are working to rule, refusing to do tasks not in their job description, after the government and its agencies ruled that they were not entitled to the scarce-skill allowance. The basis of their argument is that there are too many nurses to consider their skills scarce. However, the authorities have had to try to attract nurses from other countries because there are not enough trained nurses in Botswana.

A statement by the Botswana Land Boards and Local Authorities Workers Union (BLLAWU) said, “We continue to be used as tools to perform duties supposedly for laboratory technicians, pharmacy technicians and doctors. Where scarce skills beneficiaries are absent, it is nurses who perform such duties, which are non-nursing duties.”

Moroccan police violently break up port protest

Police used force to end the weeklong blockade of a port in southern Morocco by youths protesting against poverty and unemployment. Residents said hundreds of police arrived at Sidi Ifni port at 2 a.m. on June 7 to remove the demonstrators.

According to *Reuters*, a Western diplomat speaking on condition of anonymity said he had been told by a reliable eyewitness that eight people were killed. Local residents also reported deaths.

A local security official said, “The port has been under blockade since May 30—trucks were trapped inside and the fish they were carrying was rotting. The police moved in to remove the demonstrators.” He claimed that 20 were arrested, but none killed or injured in the operation, which began after the protesters reportedly set fire to the car of a local official.

A local resident involved in the demonstration said security forces attacked the protestors using dogs and truncheons, and a local social worker, who asked not to be identified, said, “Dozens were injured and I saw two lying dead on the ground with head wounds. Friends in different neighbourhoods told me of three other deaths.”

Locals said the protesters were complaining of being sidelined by the Rabat government, left out of economic development and passed over for jobs.

Later reports state that human rights groups have accused the police of mounting a “wave of official aggression,” which included rape and the theft of residents’ personal possessions.



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