

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

11 July 2008

## Europe

### British Museum and National Gallery pay dispute

Members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) at the British Museum were joined by members of the Prospect union (including those working in the National Gallery) in an indefinite work to rule, following a half-day strike last week.

Museum staff, including warders, security guards, scientists, conservators, curators, museum and information assistants, librarians, information systems staff, photographers and designers at both London institutions and those who provide help and advice to visitors, are said to be angered at delays by management over decisions on their pay for 2007.

The workforce have been offered a below inflation rise of 1.6 percent, plus a one-off bonus of just £100. The unions now have serious concerns that the 2008 pay negotiations will suffer a similar fate.

The strike by British Museum staff follows industrial action by members in the Museum of London, the Museum in Docklands, the Science Museum, the National Railway Museum and the Media Museum.

### UK distribution centre workers vote for strike

Workers at four distribution centres run by the catalogue superstore Argos have voted for industrial action after rejecting a 4 percent pay offer, according to the BBC on July 7.

A series of 24-hour strikes and then a four-day stoppage are to be announced this week.

The Unite union warned that this could lead to shortages of goods at Argos stores, at a time when its new catalogue is about to be launched.

The union says it is angry that the company has offered a below inflation pay deal when Home Retail Group's (the owners of Argos) profits rose by 16 percent last year and its chief executive received a pay rise of 58 percent

The strike action is expected to affect the flowing four of Argos' 15 distribution centres: Basildon,

Bridgwater, Heywood and Magna Park in Leicestershire.

### Lufthansa's pilots strike over pay

Reuters reported July 6 that pilots at Deutsche Lufthansa's CityLine and Eurowings regional carriers plan to hold a 24-hour strike in a dispute over pay.

The strike follows a breakdown in talks between the union and the airline and a vote in favour of strike action by pilots.

The walkout will affect passengers at a number of airports across Germany, including Lufthansa's main hubs at Frankfurt and Munich, the union said.

In a separate dispute over pay for ground staff and cabin crew at Lufthansa, talks are due to resume between the carrier and the Verdi union after they failed to reach a deal this week.

### Cleaners at UK airport plan strike action

According to the Unite union web site, cleaners working for Initial Air Services at Manchester Airport will strike for three days next week after the company refused further talks with the union to try to resolve a pay dispute. Manchester-based workers at Initial are planning to strike from July 17 to 20 following the company's decision to impose a 2 percent pay offer previously rejected by workers.

Union members voted overwhelmingly for strike action by 94.6 percent to 5.4 percent last month. Workers are planning further industrial action on July 22, 23 and 24 unless the dispute over pay can be resolved.

## Africa

### Nigerian judiciary workers protest non-payment

Judiciary workers in Nasarawa state, Nigeria have been on strike since June 23 to protest the delay in receiving their salaries, after the state government failed to provide the necessary budget allocation to fund the judiciary.

*Daily Trust* (Abuja) reported that hundreds of striking members of the Judicial Staff Union (JUSUN)

Nasarawa State branch stormed the state House of Assembly on July 7 to press their case. They carried placards which read: “Pay us our entitlements,” “Judiciary is also an arm of government” and “The labourer deserves his pay.”

Jimoh Musa, chairman of the union, told *Daily Trust* that the state government was insensitive to their plight. He said, “Meetings between the union official and representatives of the state government over the grievances in contention did not yield positive results, thus the decision to continue the indefinite strike action.”

### **National strike of Nigerian teachers over salary structure**

An all-out strike called by the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), which began on July 1 to demand the creation of a Teachers’ Salary Structure (TSS) for primary and secondary school teachers across the country, is continuing. The union insists that the TSS was approved several years ago but the Federal Government has so far failed to issue the necessary circular to enable it to be set up. Instead a meeting of Federal and State representatives has resolved that the NUT should pursue payment of “job-related professional allowances of varying rates” with their employers.

The NUT has rejected the resolution, insisting that it is not prepared to enter fresh dialogue over the TSS. The union general secretary, Obong Ikpe Obong, told *This Day* (Lagos) that his members would not return to work until the Federal Government had issued a circular to operationalise the special wage structure. His organization has been campaigning for a national salary structure ever since 1992.

On July 3 the All-Nigerian Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools called on the Federal Government to accede to the demand of the NUT, which it said was legitimate and should be affected immediately.

### **Nigerian lecturers still on strike, in spite of intimidation**

Lecturers at the tertiary institutions in Kano state are on strike to demand payment of arrears on their benefits and entitlements, such as rent allowance.

They have been told that if they do not return to work, the state government will refuse to continue negotiations. The government also denounced the strike

as illegal, paving the way for legal action against the strikers.

### **Ghanaian bank workers strike over dismissal and arrest of official**

Workers at the Bank of Ghana (BoG) went on indefinite strike on July 2 to protest the arrest and imprisonment of the chairman of the Senior Staff Association of the BoG, Benjamin Duffuor. The *Ghanaian Times* reported that Duffuor was arrested while addressing a meeting of workers in front of the head office in Accra, the capital.

Both Duffuor and the secretary of the association had been dismissed on June 27. Those on strike believe the dismissals were in response to their efforts to convert the association into a union, which management considers illegal. The strikers’ representatives spoke to the *Times* but refused to give their identities, described management’s actions as “intimidatory.”

On July 7 the strikers ignored a show of force by police and demonstrated outside the bank’s head offices. They sang war songs and held up signs reading, “Reinstate our leaders now,” “We want a union” and “Governor, don’t act like Mugabe”.

The strikers said they would not resume work until their leader was released and reinstated. The bank’s management has denied giving the order for the arrest.

According to the *Times*, the Bank of Ghana has instituted legal action against the Attorney-General and the National Labour Commission on the purported registration and recognition of the bank’s Senior Staff Association as a labour union.



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