

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

14 September 2007

Europe

Ukrainian coal miners strike at four mines

On September 3, some 9,000 coal miners protested in the Donetsk region of Ukraine to demand the removal of a senior manager, more investment in the industry and to protest a proposed new wages scheme whereby 50 percent of workers' hourly pay will be transferred into norm-based remuneration.

The strike involved members of the Coal Mining Industry Workers' Union of Ukraine and the Miners' Independent Trade Union of Ukraine. The following day miners struck at four mines, Centralnaya, Stakhanov, Dimitrov and Rodinskaya, owned by the state-run company Krasnoarmeyskvyhillia.

Following negotiations, in which the company agreed to remove the manager and to hold further discussions on the wages scheme, the union agreed to suspend industrial action.

The Ukraine is the third-largest coal producer in Europe after Russia and Poland, with the mining region centred in the Donbas region of the country. Last year coal production from the Ukraine stood at 80 million tonnes. The government plans to increase this to 82 million tonnes next year to cut its reliance on imports of natural gas.

10,000 protest cuts at hospital in west of Scotland

More than 10,000 people held a march and rally on September 8 at the Vale of Leven Hospital in the town of Alexandria, West Dunbartonshire, Scotland to protest the cutting of services. The protesters marched to the hospital via Christie Park and Argyll Park.

The Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board plans to cut services so that future emergency patients would instead go to the Royal Alexandra Hospital in the town of Paisley, 15 miles away. It also proposes to close wards for mentally ill patients and midwife-run maternity units.

The hospital serves a catchment area of about 100,000 people. There is only one road out of the Vale

of Leven to Paisley (the A82) and it is often clogged by traffic, causing fears that in emergency cases, lives would be placed at risk.

Services at the hospital have been consistently run down over the past five years. In 2002 the maternity unit was closed and its accident and emergency unit was shut down two months later.

In May this year the board announced its latest proposed cuts and stated that a review of services is set to be completed by November 2007.

Separately, Unison has said it will ballot staff employed by National Health Service Greater Glasgow and Clyde for strike action over hospital car parks charges, which can cost as much as £140 per month.

Postal staff in Stoke-on-Trent, England take unofficial strike action

Postal staff at a Royal Mail sorting office in Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent, England walked off the job in unofficial strike action on September 11 in protest the suspension of 12 of their colleagues. The action involved 75 staff. The strike caused delays to postal deliveries in the city.

Royal Mail suspended the staff on full pay over allegations bullying and harassment. This week, several of the workers have made statements opposing the allegations. Steve Goodison said, "It's a sad day. Twenty-three years I've worked for Royal Mail and I've never been disciplined in my life." Paul Dawson added that he was "in shock" at the "unfounded allegations."

Another worker, Jason Holdcroft, recently returned to work after several weeks of paternity leave and was suspended. Holdcroft said, "I've done two days and then I'm suspended for bullying and harassment but I don't actually know who it is I've bullied and harassed."

The following day, the strikers returned to work. Royal Mail said that it would begin an investigation into the allegations as soon as possible.

Africa

Doctors on indefinite strike in Ivory Coast

All doctors in Ivory Coast have joined an indefinite strike at state hospitals throughout the country. According to IRIN news, the doctors began their action September 5 and are refusing to provide even minimum emergency services with patients being turned away from hospitals and other health facilities.

No details of the doctors' demands are given except that they are in dispute with the government over their pay scale and benefits. An earlier strike that took place in August did provide minimum services, but this time doctors have refused a request from the Minister of Public Health and Hygiene to provide them. IRIN report that the strike has even spread to the north of the country, which was under rebel control in the recent civil war.

Police attack strikers in Pretoria, South Africa

A clash between police and a group of striking rubbish collecting workers resulted in police firing stun grenades in order to round them up. The strike involves workers who empty dustbins in the city of Tshwane, a metropolitan region of Gauteng province that includes Pretoria. They are employed by Milnex, a waste disposal company contracted by the local council to carry out part of the city's refuse collection operations. The workers, members of the South African Municipal Workers Union (Samwu), have been on strike for the last two weeks demanding that they are absorbed into the city council's workforce and receive higher pay levels. Last week the strike was ruled illegal by the High Court under South African labour laws, but the rubbish collectors have so far refused to return to work. Milnex claim they are paying their employees the wage that was agreed in the tender awarded to them by the municipal council.

South African rail workers strike

Railway workers, including train drivers, went on strike at the depots belonging to the state transport company Transnet Freight in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. The 300 or so workers are members of the United Transport and Allied Trade Union (Utatu) and are protesting over what the union considers is lack of consultation over changes in working conditions. A spokesperson for the Transnet National Ports Authority could not say what impact the strike would have on the major South African port of

Durban.

Strike of Kenyan tea workers

Over 10,000 tea plantation workers began strike action this week in 18 or so estates owned by Unilever Tea Kenya Limited (UTK) in Kericho, Kenya. The strikers, members of the Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union (KPAWU), are accusing UTK of renegeing on a 16 percent wage increase that was agreed between management and the union last year.

Government officials declared the strike illegal and the Kericho chairman of KPAWU pleaded with the strikers to return to work while their grievance was investigated. Mr. Francis Atwoli, general secretary of KPAWU, said that other multinational tea companies had already paid their workers the increase agreed under the same collective bargaining deal and that the union would have no alternative to taking legal action if UTK refused to pay the increase by September 20.



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