

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

19 July 2001

UK rail guards continue strike action

On July 18, thousands of UK rail passengers were affected by the latest strike by guards in a long-running dispute over their safety role.

The strike was the third called by guards employed by the private train operator c2c, which runs services between London's Fenchurch Street and Essex and normally carries 25,000 passengers a day. The company predicted that it would run 11 of the normal 47 peak time trains scheduled.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport union, of whom half of the 130 guards at c2c are members, called the strike. A further strike by the guards is also planned for August 1.

The RMT has said that untrained managers are being used by c2c in an attempt to break the strike. Most of the other private train operators have signed an agreement with the RMT over the safety role played by guards.

Firefighters in Merseyside continue strike over recruitment policy

Firefighters in Merseyside, England are continuing their eight-day strike against proposals by the Chief Fire Officer to recruit non-uniformed officers into senior positions. The firefighters are member of the Fire Brigades Union and the action began on July 13 at 9am (GMT).

The beginning of the strike was marked by a demonstration of some 3,000 officers from as far away as Northern Ireland, Scotland and Somerset. The demonstrators held an hour-long march through the centre of Liverpool and a rally. Vicky Knight, the national secretary of the FBU's Women's Committee, said, "The importance of the march is to raise awareness of what the Chief Fire Officer is trying to do in Merseyside by trying to alter the nationally agreed procedures to allow non-uniformed officers into officers' posts. They have no experience, no fire grounding, no proper training and they do not even

understand operational procedures. They have not done the job themselves."

In an effort to limit the impact of the strike the city council and fire authority have sanctioned the use of some 530 men and women from the Army, RAF, and Royal Navy who are using "Green Goddess" Army trucks as substitutes for fire engines.

Marconi workers hold unofficial protest against job losses

On July 17, workers at Marconi's hi-tech research and development work plant at Poole in Dorset staged an unofficial walkout to protest the plant's proposed closure with the loss of 570 jobs. Marconi is also planing to shed hundreds of other jobs at its other sites, including those in Liverpool and Coventry, with a total of 1,500 jobs being lost in the UK.

A delegation of Marconi staff are also set to mount a protest outside the company's annual general meeting in London on July 18.

Earlier this month Marconi issued a profit warning and said that sales were down by 15 percent for the year. The company then announced plans to cut a further 4,000 jobs worldwide. This followed an earlier announcement of 3,000 job losses, bringing the total to 7,000.

Iberia forced to suspend all flights after pilots resign

At midnight on July 12, Spain's largest airline Iberia temporarily suspended all its national and international flights following the resignation of 99 of its pilots. The company said that the suspension of flights would affect some 80,000 passengers.

The resignations were the latest action in a long-running dispute over the provisions of a 1995 agreement on wages, involving a demand for a 20 percent wage rise and better pensions. The 1,875 pilots involved in the dispute are members of the Sepla trade union and have held one-day strikes on each Tuesday in July and each Monday in August.

Portuguese auto supplier workers strike to demand collective agreement

Workers at Johnson Controls in Portalegre, Portugal, a major automotive supplier producing seating and interior systems and batteries, struck on July 17, 18 and 19 in opposition to the company refusing to implement a collective industry agreement.

The trade union involved, SIMA (Sindicato das Industrias Metalurgicas e Afins), stated that union representatives and shop stewards at the company are being harassed and threatened by the management.

Workers occupy council offices in Kaduna, Nigeria

Council officials were forced to escape from the back door of their building, as hundreds of refuse collectors and street sweepers, mainly women, occupied their offices. The workers are protesting non-payment of salary arrears and accuse the council of planning to cut their monthly wage from N5, 600 to N3, 000 (\$50 to \$27).

Barricading themselves in the building, the workers intend to make the council, the administrative body in the region, ungovernable. Their leader, Mrs. Yakubu, explained that they had not yet received their February salary.

Zimbabwe's milling industry workers strike

Workers at National Foods Limited in Harare, Zimbabwe took strike action to reject a management offer of a monthly wage of 7,000 Zimbabwe dollars (US\$127). They are demanding an increase from their present salary of 5,600 Zimbabwe dollars (US\$102) to a minimum wage of 10,000 Zimbabwe dollars (US\$182) per month. They were expected to be joined by workers at Nutresco Foods, Agrifoods Private Limited and Blue Ribbon Food Limited. Farai Kunaka, secretary-general of the Milling Industry Union, said that the wage was to sustain the workers through the "current harsh economic conditions in the country".

South African paper workers strike

Up to 3,000 workers in the paper and pulp industry took strike action to demand a wage increase. The workers are mainly members of the Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union, employed by the Sappi and Mondi mills. Plants at Gauteng, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu Natal, the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape have been affected. Although the union had lowered its pay claim from a 9

percent rise to 8.5 percent, the employers refused to move on their 8 percent offer. Other sections of the paper industry could be involved in solidarity action.

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