

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

29 April 2005

Europe

Doctors strike in Netherlands

Dutch doctors held a short strike April 21 to protest a new government health care system scheduled to come into operation next year. The stoppage involved thousands of family doctors, who stopped work from 9 a.m. to noon, responding only to emergency medical cases.

The national doctors' association, LHV, said that "slightly more than half" of its 80 regional branches took part in the action. It also reported that doctors used this time to follow proceedings in parliament as Health Minister Hans Hoogervorst spoke on the new health care proposals.

The government plan is centered on cutting health costs by introducing competition and other free-market measures into health care. The reform is expected to have a detrimental impact on family doctors. Research published this week revealed that three quarters of all family doctors could expect to see their salary fall as a result of the introduction of a fixed charge of 7 euros per basic consultation. According to the survey, some doctors could see their incomes fall by up to 50,000 euros a year.

Protest hits IBM job cuts in Germany

On April 26, 750 IBM employees and trade unionists demonstrated outside the IBM headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany. The protest was called in opposition to the company's decision to close two subsidiaries in Hanover and Schweinfurt, with the loss of 600 jobs.

The demonstration was called by the Verdi trade union and was the second such protest to be held against the closure plans. The first was held in Hanover during CeBIT—the large German IT fair. Those protesting came from a number of towns and cities including Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Hanover and Schweinfurt.

London Transport workers to strike on Election

Day

This week, hundreds of transport workers in London voted to strike on May 5, the day of the British general election. Members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) voted to take industrial action in a dispute over redundancies. The workers, including bus inspectors, transport information call centre staff, and workers at the London Transport Museum in Covent Garden are expected to participate in the strike.

The union is in dispute with Transport for London (TfL) and claimed that the company has introduced a new attendance and disciplinary code without consultation. It also said that it believed TfL had plans to impose a similar system on its members working for London Underground.

Bus drivers in Wallonia, Belgium, set to strike

On April 28, bus drivers are set to hold industrial action in Wallonia over a pay dispute. The drivers are in dispute with the Wallonian bus service, SRWT. The stoppage was called by a number of bus workers' trade unions. These included the CGSP union, which protested against the SRWT's proposed 1.1 percent salary rise. The raise would boost salaries by just 12 euro cents per hour.

Africa

Zambian council workers take national strike action

Defying a government threat of mass sackings, Zambian council workers began national strike action on April 25. The Zambian United Local Authority Workers Union (ZULAWU) called the strike in support of a demand for the government to give K35 billion (\$US7.6million) to local councils to fund packages for retirees and workers seconded to utility companies.

Local Government deputy minister John Mwaimba warned that the strike was illegal and that the government would take "appropriate action." According to the *Times of Zambia* (Ndola), Mwaimba called on ZULAWU to work with the government in

improving operations in local authorities.

Employer opens fire on workforce in South Africa

Two workers were killed and one critically injured on April 18 in Benoni, South Africa, after their employer, Tony Jones of MCE Engineering, opened fire on 15 employees during a wage dispute.

Dumisa Ntuli, spokesperson for the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), told IOL that the shooting was the result of “hate, prejudice and racist conduct.” He said the incident was not surprising because “this is the same employer who last year set 10 dogs on his workers for no apparent reason. The workers were constantly intimidated by dogs, which were everywhere—at their work stations, canteen and at the office of the director.”

On the day of the shooting, the workers had demanded to be paid their full salaries of R650 (\$US107), rather than the R100 (\$US16.50) they had received the previous Friday. IOL reported that Jones’s response was to order the employers to wait outside while he went into his office. When he returned, he began to shoot directly at the workers.

One of the workers, Hendrick Mahlakoane, died at the scene. Two others were wounded, one of whom died in hospital the following day.

Later, Jones was found dead in his office with a bullet wound to the head, having apparently shot himself.

Stalemate in Cymot strike negotiations

Seventy-six members of the Metal and Allied Namibian Workers Union (Manwu) at Cymot in Windhoek, Namibia, went on strike to demand the reinstatement of Albertus Cloete, a member of the works committee. Management accused Cloete of “insubordination.”

Cymot suspended the strikers, claiming that they had ignored three notices to return to work, and that the “wildcat strike” was illegal. The union refused to recognise a disciplinary hearing chaired by the company’s labour consultant. Manwu Secretary General Moses Shiikwa told the *Namibian* (Windhoek) that the hearing could not be fair, because the person conducting it was “bought and paid by the company.” The union intends to ask for mediation from the Office of the Labour Commissioner.

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