

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

23 September 2005

Europe

Seamen in France strike to oppose privatisation

On September 21, French seamen employed by the Corsica-Mediterranean shipping company (SNCM) took strike action to oppose the privatization of the firm. The action resulted in more than 1,500 travellers being stranded overnight after two ferry boats were prevented from sailing. The *Mediterranean* ferry that was due to leave for Algiers with 1,000 passengers and 750 vehicles was prevented from leaving the port at Marseilles. The *Napoléon Bonaparte*, scheduled to depart for Corsica with 550 passengers and about 100 vehicles, was also halted.

The dispute began when it was announced that that two investment funds, Butler Capital Partners and Caravelle, were in line to take over the state shipping company. SNCM employs 2,400 workers.

Corsican truck drivers strike in dispute over sacked colleague

On September 12, fuel truck drivers on the French island of Corsica began strike action in defence of a driver who was sacked by the company last month. The driver was dismissed after his empty fuel truck, belonging to the company Corse Carburants, rolled over and plunged into a ravine near the main northern city of Bastia. The incident caused a 12-hour traffic jam.

Drivers have demanded his reinstatement pending the conclusion of a police inquiry into the accident and that company management apologise for the sacking.

By the third day of the industrial action on September 15 supplies of petrol and diesel were running low, with trucks parked for kilometres along roads leading to ports on the French mainland serving the Mediterranean island. Nearly all fuel transport drivers in the north of Corsica were supporting the strike action. Drivers in the south of the island held their own

industrial action in support of colleagues in the north.

On September 15 mediation talks were held between the employer of the sacked employee and government officials.

Alitalia flight assistants in Italy continue stoppages

Flight assistants at the Italian state airline Alitalia began a 24-hour strike on September 20 in an ongoing dispute over the recognition of the Sult trade union. An estimated 600 flight attendants participated in the action.

During the day Alitalia cancelled 12 flights due to “technical and operational reasons” and denied that they were caused by the 24-hour strike.

The strike had already been weakened beforehand by an agreement between Sult and the company. Prior to the industrial action, the union agreed that its members not apply their protest to flights during peak morning and evening hours or to flights linking the Italian mainland to Sicily or Sardinia.

The action was the second of this month at the airline. The first time flight attendants took strike action for 48 hours.

Middle East

Iranian factory workers strike over irregular work

Around 300 workers at a tyre factory in Tehran protested on September 17 outside their place of work against their irregular work patterns. Workers at the Lastik Alborz plant claimed they faced repeated threats of being laid off. For at least the past four months, they had been forced to work in irregular patterns, they said, adding that on some occasions the factory owners would tell them that there was no work scheduled for long periods of time. The protesting workers also claimed that a €10 million loan that their employers had received from Europe had not been spent to pay

their wages.

Africa

Zimbabwean textile workers angry after months without pay

Textile workers at the David Whitehead factory in Chegutu, Zimbabwe, have been on strike since September 12. They are demanding the payment of three months wages owed to them.

On September 16, hundreds of angry strikers gathered outside the factory demanding an update on developments from the management. They waited for several hours, but management refused to speak to them. Eventually the strikers forced their way into the factory and pushed out the skeleton staff.

Workers told the Harare-based *Herald* newspaper that after months without pay, most of them were almost destitute. Some workers said they were living “in the open” because they had been unable to pay their rent.

The *Herald* quoted one worker saying, “I have worked for this company since 1971 and this is the first time I have gone for three months without pay.” Another elderly worker told the paper, “These people are cruel because we are now going without food and these people don’t care.”

After the strikers had entered the factory, the police were called and forced them to flee, but they later regrouped.

Workers in Mali hold one-day general strike

A one-day general strike, organised by the National Workers’ Union of Mali (UNTM), was held in Mali on September 19, with more than 80 percent of the country’s total unionised workforce participating.

Workers in the public and partly privatised sectors were the most solid in responding to the strike call. Bank workers, who are divided between the UNTM and its rival the Malian Workers Labour Congress (CSTM), did not take part in the strike.

According to ANGOP (Luanda), public transport was paralysed in parts of the capital Bamako, where vehicle owners supported the strike. The strikers’ demands include: better pay and conditions, reduced tariffs on water, electricity, telephone calls, pharmaceuticals and petroleum (gas), and the payment of redundancy money to workers being put out of work by the government-run corporations and companies.

New strike by gold miners in South Africa

Workers at the Bonanza South gold mine near Klerksdorp, South Africa are staging a strike and underground sit-in to demand a better pay increase. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), to which the strikers belong, says that around 2,000 workers are involved in the strike.

The miners are demanding an increase of 15 percent, while the company has offered 6.5 percent.

Management have issued a thinly veiled warning that they are considering either firing those on strike or closing the mine, by saying that the strike will lead to nothing “other than a threat to their [the strikers’] future employment.”

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