

Workers Struggles: Europe, the Middle East and Africa

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German bank workers agreement rejected by unions

On March 29 commercial banks and union leaders in Germany agreed to a deal on wages and conditions covering 470,000 workers. The agreement gave bank workers a 3.1 percent pay rise, a one-off payment and a performance-linked bonus. Originally the unions had made pay claims of at least 6 percent for this year's pay agreement.

Within a day that settlement has fallen through over the issue of compulsory work on Saturdays and other differences. The HBV banking employees union and the DAG white-collar union, who signed the agreement, issued a joint statement on March 30 saying they could not agree to Saturday shifts becoming the norm and that there were still disagreements over wage levels.

The employers' chief negotiator, Tessen von Heydebreck, said that the employers' association would be recommending the deal that was agreed and signed by the employers and the unions at the last stage of the negotiations.

DAG leader Gerhard Renner said that the unions had rejected the employers' recommendation, and that they would be involved with strike action and other protests next week.

Iberian airline pilots strike to demand contract ratification

Airline pilots employed by Iberia airlines, the main Spanish carrier, struck on March 26 in a dispute over a delayed contract. The pilots are planning to strike for eight days. On the first day of the dispute more than 50 Iberia airline flights were cancelled. The company has estimated that some 200 flights will be cancelled during the first four days of the strike, with the airline losing about \$100 million in revenue.

A prior agreement between the company and the

Spanish Airline Pilots Union (SEPLA) will still ensure that up to 95 percent of Iberia's 800 daily flights will not be affected by the action.

The union is in dispute with Iberia because the company has not yet signed a final version of the contract agreement. SEPLA has claimed that the company is trying to renegotiate some of the terms in the contract, such as bonuses for pilots who fly at night.

Ukrainian teachers strike to demand payment of wages

Ukrainian teachers struck in the Kiev and Mykolaiv regions on March 30 to demand the payment of months of overdue wages. The action closed 58 schools and 50,000 schoolchildren had their classes called off, according to the Education Ministry.

Some of the teachers have not been paid since 1996. The ministry said the wage debt to teachers in the Ukraine totalled 427.8 million hryvna (\$109 million).

The latest strike is part of an ongoing campaign by the Ukraine's 500,000 teachers that began at the start of the school term in September. The ministry said that it expected teachers to continue strikes in the next few weeks and that they may boycott end of term examinations in May.

British lecturers to vote in strike ballot

The Association of University Teachers (AUT) has called a strike ballot of its members next month. The union leadership voted for the ballot on March 26 after it rejected the employers' pay offer of 3 percent. It has called for an increase of 10 percent.

Strike action by lecturers would disrupt the processing of university admissions and the marking and administration of exam papers.

The AUT has estimated that lecturers require a pay rise of 35 percent to close the salary gap with other professionals. It labelled the present pay offer "insulting and mean-minded". The ballot result is to be announced at the AUT's council meeting on May 12.

Following the ballot call, AUT General Secretary David Triesman said it could be the "beginning of a spring of discontent in education.... Lecturers have shown unparalleled productivity for more than 10 years. Student numbers have doubled while staff numbers increased by less than 15 percent. Their real terms increase in pay over 18 years is a mere 3.1 percent. Schoolteachers have done 15 times better. Offering us less than other public sector awards made by the pay review bodies will infuriate university and college staff."

Israeli public workers strike ends

A four-day strike by Israeli public sector workers ended on March 29, following an agreement between the Histadrut federation of trade unions and the government. The parties agreed to a provisional increase in pay of 4.8 percent. Levi Morav, a spokesman for the Histadrut, said, "The strike is over from this moment. There is an agreement but it has not yet been signed."

At the height of the strike, over 400,000 workers were involved throughout the country. The strike affected the operation of local authorities, government offices, Tel Aviv's Ben-Gurion Airport, hospitals, ports, trains and state-owned utilities. State defence workers downed tools on March 25 to support the strike and staff at the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange and banks opened late on March 28.

That day Finance Minister Meir Sheerit said, "There is no chance that we will answer their demands. There is no money to pay and we will not pay." The deal is significantly less than that first proposed by Histadrut. In the run-up to the strike, Histadrut called for a 14 percent wage increase to compensate for 1998 and 1999 inflation. The treasury had offered a 3.85 percent wage increase. The settlement only includes a rise of 4.6 percent for 1998 and a 0.2 percent supplement for 1997. No agreement was concluded regarding a pay increase for 1999. Histadrut has agreed not to take any strike action that would disrupt the economy until September. Sheerit said the deal was "good for the economy, good for the workers, without breaking the overall wage framework."

South African farm workers left with no food or money

Farm workers who worked for La Rochelle Boere were left with nothing when the company sold the farm. They were given no notice, no severance pay, and no long service bonus. The attorney for La Rochelle agreed that the company might have contravened the Labour Relations Act and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act.

Nhabindo Fernando said he had been a labourer at La

Rochele for 29 years and was paid 12 rand for a 10-hour day. He asked: "How are we going to feed ourselves and our family with no money?"

The 60 workers, although on a meagre wage, were given no food. They had to get that from the company shop and the cost was deducted from their wages at the end of the month. "Because of this," Fernando said, "some of us got as little as 53 rand a month."

Elias Mathebula, who had worked for the farm for 40 years, said, "We had tried to reason with Barry de Villiers, but he said it was our democratic right to go to the Labour Department if we wanted to."

Zambian council workers strike

Lusaka city council workers went on strike March 28, adamant they would not return until town clerk Jack Mwiimbu and his directors were removed from office.

The 2,000 Zambian United Local Authority Workers (ZULAWU) withdrew their labour in protest at the way the council management was operating. The non-payment of their education allowance was one of the grievances. The council workers refused an offer from the management of half payment of their education allowance this month and the rest next month.

Lawrence Tubi, secretary of ZULAWU, said the strike would continue until the Ministry of Local Government and Housing met their demands. "We shall only resume work when Jack and his directors stop showing their faces at the Civic Centre," he said. "There is no point having a management which has failed to serve its workers and the public."

The council has not paid money it owes into the Local Authority Superannuation Fund Pension Board and the Zambia Revenues Authority. Town Clerk John Mulenga said, "We, like any other council in the country, are facing liquidity problems due to a limited revenues base." An angry worker, Dickson Daka, demanded to know: "Why is it that directors are getting K350,000 weekly entertainment allowances? Where do they get the money from?"



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