

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

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Spanish pilots continue strike over contract ratification

Pilots continued their strike of Spain's national airline carrier Iberia this week. The strike began on March 26 and has led to the cancellation of about 400 flights, averaging 50 a day over the Easter holiday. Iberia has issued a statement saying that nearly 100,000 passengers have been affected by the strike. The strike was originally intended to last eight days.

Representatives of the pilots union SEPLA have met Iberiamanagement frequently since the dispute began but have been unable to resolve the dispute over the ratification of a new contract.

Iberia's director of communication Luis Diaz Guell has condemned the strike for being called at one of the busiest times of the year, and said that since 1994 Iberia has experienced an average of 1.5 strikes per year.

The strike comes at a time when the state holding company Sepi is privatising Iberia. British American and American Airline have agreed to take a 10 percent stake in the airline. Sepi is in the process of scrutinising bids from Spanish firms expressing interest in buying another 30 percent.

Belgian transit workers strike to demand safety

On March 31, about 3,000 transit workers demonstrated in Belgium's capital Brussels to protest increasing levels of violence they face at work. The workers were joined by bus drivers from Belgium's Flemish and Walloon provinces who aired similar grievances. Many of the boulevards in the centre of the city were clogged as hundreds of buses came to a standstill.

The transportation authority STIB, that operates buses, trams and the metro in Brussels, said that the strike would hit about a 50 percent of services in the city.

UK soccer players vote to strike to demand unpaid wages

Soccer players at Crystal Palace Football Club in London, England had threatened to go on strike over the Easter holiday to demand the payment of overdue wages for March. The players represented by the Professional Footballers Association (PFA) voted to strike and not play in the April 5 home game against Sunderland.

PFA leader Gordon Taylor said on April 3, "At the moment they are playing today and if the March wages are paid over this weekend they will be playing on Monday. If not there could be a big problem with the game against Sunderland."

The game was eventually played on April 5, but the club has called in the administrators due to their financial problems, with debts of more than £9 million. Recently, Palace made 46 recent redundancies involving the coaching and administration staff.

The administrators--Moore, Stephens, Booth and White--have recommended that any player earning over £5,000 a month should have their wages be cut by 50 percent over the next 14 weeks to stem the cash-flow crisis.

French racecourse staff in dispute over contract terms

Racecourse staff took strike action on the first day of the French racing season at the Longchamp course in Paris on April 1. The workers struck over the terms of a new contract concerning working hours, recruitment levels and overtime.

Louis Romanet, the director general of the ruling body of French racing, France Galop, said that the body would not meet the demands of the staff. "There was a demand for the work force to be increased by 10 percent, but we can only accommodate a maximum of seven," said Romanet.

Zambian miners' families demonstrate

A demonstration of more than 50 Zambian miners'

wives and children took place on April 5 to demand payment of allowances going as far back as July of last year. The protest marched the 3 kilometres from Kalulushi to Chambishi mine--with riot police intervening--with banners reading: "Our husbands don't work for charity".

The demonstration was deemed illegal by the police because the families had not sought a permit to carry out the protest. The mayor of Kalulushi, Agnes Bwayla, addressing the demonstration said they should apply for a permit if they wanted to protest, then went on, "In the meantime, you may go back to your homes and continue with your household chores."

The miners' families demanded the reinstatement of six sacked miners.

Nurses strike in Ghana

Nurses and other paramedical workers throughout Ghana went on strike on Wednesday March 31 to demand improvements in their working conditions. Some older nurses are continuing to work alongside doctors, but the hospitals and other health facilities are almost at a standstill.

The Korle Bu Teaching and Ridge Hospital's outpatients departments in Accra were nearly empty. Whereas the Ridge hospital would normally deal with about 200 patients a day, only 37 were treated on Thursday. At Korle Bu a senior nurse said, "The young active ones who are supposed to handle the patients are not with us today, so we do what is humanly possible."

The military and police hospitals, where the nurses are not on strike, were taking referrals of most serious cases.



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