

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

1 July 1999

Ground staff at Orly Airport in Paris strike against new contract

On June 25 baggage handlers and runway guidance personnel at Orly Airport in Paris, France went on strike to oppose the introduction of a new contract. The staff are opposing a reduction in the working week from 39 to 35 hours which ends the previous agreement giving workers three days off work at the end of a week's shift. The strike was called by a ground staff trade union.

Cypriot pilots continue strike for a further 48 hours

Pilots at the state-controlled Cyprus Airways airline took strike action on June 22. The strike lasted for 24 hours and was called by the pilots' union PALPU. The staff then continued the strike for another 48 hours. The dispute affected 32 fights on June 23 and 24. More than 9,000 people had been scheduled to travel.

The dispute began after the airline advertised vacancies for captains for its charter subsidiary Eurocypria. The company's present policy was to disbar PALPU copilots, who work for the scheduled flight division of the group, from applying for the jobs. The union, following a disagreement over this recruitment policy, called the strike.

The company offset the impact of the industrial action by leasing aircraft from abroad and by using pilots who were members of another union. On June 24, 14 of the 18 planned flights took off. The Cypriot government announced on June 23 that it would temporarily open its air corridors to all airlines from midnight to defeat the strike. The government's decision meant those previously protected Cyprus Airways routes, including those to London, Heathrow, Tel Aviv, Israel and to Greek destinations would be open to other airlines. Communications Minister Leondios Ierodiakonou threatened that this measure could last beyond the dispute. "If we see this irresponsible behavior continuing then the decision for

deregulation will remain in force," he said.

The company said that the dispute had cost it £100,000 (\$180,000) a day, with most of this taken up by the cost of leasing planes.

Albanian airline staff strike for higher wages

Staff at Albania's only international airport went on strike on June 28 to demand higher wages. The dispute at the Rinas airport in Tirana resulted in the cancellation of all commercial flights. The workers are demanding that the government give them a wage increase of 50 percent and reimburse losses stemming from NATO's restrictions on Albanian airspace during the bombing of Serbia. During the bombing campaign, the Albanian government handed control of its airspace over to NATO, with the Rinas airport being a main base of the operation. A representative of the strikers said that humanitarian and emergency medical flights would be able to land at the airport, as well as those carrying Prime Minister Pandeli Majko.

Czech airline union calls off planned industrial action

On June 23, the Czech Air Traffic Controllers' Association (CZATCA) voted to call off a proposed strike threat following a government decision to suspend the director of the Rizeni Letoveho Provozu Ceske Republiky state-owned air traffic control company.

The CZATCA had called a strike that was to begin on June 25. It had called for the removal of General Director Petr Materna, saying that management at the Airline were implementing an inadequate new radar system and forcing employees to work excessive overtime. The union issued a joint statement with the Transport and Communications Ministry after the government suspended the General until the end of July, pending further negotiations. As part of the agreement, the Brussels-based European air traffic control body, Eurocontrol will assess the new radar system and the overtime dispute.

Strike in Czech bicycle factory

280 workers at the Velamos bicycle factory located in Sobotin in North Moravia, Czech Republic went on strike Thursday, June 17. The strike began because the workers were not paid for more than three months. Management said that the firm has to pay its debts to the banks first and offered only minor "help" to overcome the "worst problems for the employees". This amounted to just CZK 1,000 (US\$33) this week and promises that more would follow. This proposal sparked off the protest. The workers occupied their workplaces and pledged their readiness to strike until they get what they were owed.

Polish nurses protest low pay

Thousands of nurses protesting low pay and the elimination of jobs demonstrated June 23 in downtown Warsaw. They placed hundreds of their white nurses' caps on the street outside the parliament building, in front of a police barricade and a line of riot policemen.

The protest of some 7,000 workers included ambulance drivers supporting the demonstration organized by the National Nurses Union and the Midwives Trade Union. The unions say government health care "reform" has failed to raise nurses' pay, currently about \$150 a month. Newly created provincial management boards have also laid off nurses in their regional clinics and hospitals. According to the government, 50,000 health employees, including doctors and nurses, will lose their jobs this year.

Irish bus drivers vote to reject restructuring

Bus drivers at the Bus Eireann company in Ireland voted to oppose a restructuring programme. The workers, members of the National Bus and Rail Union, voted by 567 to seven against the restructuring last week. In the same ballot, drivers also voted by 553 to 23 in favour of industrial action if the company tries to implement the plan without consultation.

South African Tyre workers strike in solidarity with US workers

Eight hundred rubber workers at Continental AG's Tyre Ltd., Port Elizabeth, South Africa, went on a two-hour strike June 24 in support of 1,500 workers who have been on strike against the company's plant in Charlotte, North Carolina since September 1998. The South African rubber workers are members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). Their American counterparts are members

of the United Steel Workers of America (USWA), both being affiliated to the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers Union (ICEM).

While the protest generated sincere solidarity from South African workers, the USWA leadership has used the campaign, which will continue in France, Belgium and Australia, to cover up its isolation of the 10-month-old strike in the US.

South African Airport workers strike threat

Workers employed by Airports Company of South Africa threatened to strike if their demand for a 9 percent across the board wage increase, plus 5 per cent for inflation, is not implemented. The three unions involved—the SA Transport Workers Union, the Transport and General Workers Union and the National Health and Allied Workers Union—will have the option to strike if the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration fails to get an agreement. Management has not moved at all on its offer of 7 percent since the onset of negotiations in March. The unions have reduced their claim from a 20 percent wage increase, but still retain demands for increases in housing benefits, night allowances and paid maternity leave.



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