

# Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

14 April 2000

## **French airport workers strike over introduction of 35-hour week**

Airport staff struck for two days this week in a dispute over the introduction of the Jospin government's 35-hour-week legislation. The strike on April 9 and 10 involved baggage handlers, cleaners and other airport workers, resulting in the closure of one of the two runways at Orly airport, located south of Paris.

The action was organised by four unions currently in negotiations with the ADP airport authority to clarify the conditions of a January 31 accord on how the 35-hour week would apply to the industry. It ended April 11 following an agreement with three of the unions. The Force Ouvrière union, representing 5 percent of employees in the industry, called for the strike to continue and said that workers should be compensated as the airports are opened up to more competition.

## **German metalworkers strike for pay increase and reduced working hours**

Three thousand five hundred metalworkers walked off the job April 10 for two hours in the east German state of Thuringia. The “warning strike” was part of campaign to demand a pay increase and a reduction in working hours—from 38 to 35—in parity with metalworkers in the west. Some 17 firms were affected by the action and other strikes were scheduled to take place in Berlin, Brandenburg, Saxony and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

On April 11, the IG Metall union and the employers association agreed to the deal, which will increase wages by 3 percent starting May 1, and another 2.1 percent starting May 1 next year. This was the same pay settlement that the employers and IG Metall agreed with workers in the western state of North Rhine-Westphalia last month. Workers in the east still earn on average 20 percent less than their counterparts in the west. Both parties also agreed to delay the introduction of shorter working hours until April 30, 2003 in order

to give firms time to prepare and “plan security”.

The agreement covers 100,000 metal/engineering workers in the Berlin and Brandenburg regions and is expected to be ratified by IG Metall for a further 180,000 workers in east of the country.

## **Paperworkers in Finland begin first ever nationwide strike**

Finnish paper workers began their first ever nationwide strike on April 11 in a dispute over a new contract. At least 30,000 paper workers are involved in the strike, which is affecting the entire chemical pulp, and paper industry, including the board and packaging sector.

The action follows a breakdown in talks between national incomes conciliator Juhani Salonius; Seppo Riski, the director of Labour Market Policy of the Confederation of Finnish Industry and Employers; and Lauri Ihalainen, chairman of the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions. Disagreement over the new contract centres on several issues such as the shortening of working hours, a ban on layoffs, and the use of contract labour in the industry

The Paperworkers' Union in Sweden has stated that its members in the Swedish mills of Finnish companies will not carry out work that was due to be completed in Finland.

## **Czech miners continue occupation of mine threatened with closure**

Miners at the Kohinoor mine in Mariánské Lázně, north Bohemia are continuing to occupy a pit threatened with closure for a second week. The sit-in began on March 31 following failure to reach an agreement with the owners of the mine, the MUS mining company. Following the occupation, the remainder of the pit's miners above ground went on strike and the pit has been closed since.

The miners are calling for the resignation of the management at the mine and for MUS to halt plans to liquidate the mine and sell it to another owner. They are

also demanding that they be not penalised for their occupation. The pit was first marked for closure last year by the government and the miners held a sit-in last December in protest.

### **Strike in Burkina Faso over death of journalist**

Riot police dispersed a demonstration at the start of a 72-hour strike in Burkina Faso, West Africa, on Monday this week. The strike was called by the Collective of Democratic Organisations and political parties—a coalition of opposition groups—to protest government inaction over the death of journalist Norbert Zongo and against police use of tear gas to break up similar protests on Saturday.

The demonstrators have been demanding a thorough investigation into 1998 death of the West African country's best-known investigative journalist and editor of the opposition weekly *l'Independent*. The charred bodies of Zongo and three companions were found in a burned-out car on a country road on December 13, 1998. Zongo had been investigating the suspicious death in 1997 of a chauffeur working for Burkina's Prime Minister Compaore's brother, Francois. A government commission into Zongo's death issued a report on May 7, 1999, naming six soldiers in Compaore's presidential guard as the prime suspects, but nothing further was done. On the first anniversary of Zongo's death, more than 30,000 people had marched in Ouagadougou to demand action.

### **Strike causes fuel shortage in Kinshasa, DR Congo**

A strike by workers at an Abidjan refinery caused serious disruption to fuel supplies last week in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A press release from the Congolese Fuel Company released on Tuesday said Kinshasa experienced long queues at petrol stations as motorists waited in vain to buy fuel. Thousands of residents were forced to walk several kilometres in search of transport.

### **Sierra Leone teachers may go back on strike**

Teachers in Sierra Leone have been on strike for two weeks, demanding the payment of salaries held back since the start of this year. The strike was due to come to an end on Monday but few teachers reported for work and a substantial number of schools remained closed. The teachers have the backing of primary and secondary school students, 50 of whom were arrested by police after some pupils attempted to kidnap the Minister of Education, Dr. Alpha Wurie, and burn

down the Ministry's building at New England.

### **Zambian community development workers on go-slow**

Starting this week, around 55 workers at the National Vocational Rehabilitation Centre in Ndola are on go-slow to demand payment of their two months salary arrears. The Zambian government is insisting that the centre should charge disabled students so as to become self-sustaining.



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