

# Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

29 June 2000

## **French air traffic controllers take strike action**

Air traffic controllers struck for 24 hours on June 26 to protest the threat of privatisation. The action, the first general strike by air traffic staff in nearly 10 years, affected all the country's airlines and airports, causing widespread disruption to both domestic and international flights.

Airline companies forced to cancel and delay flights included British Airways, Ryan Air, Buzz, EasyJet, Iberia, Swissair, Crossair, Finnair and Scandinavian Airlines. Although controllers returned to work as scheduled the following day, cancellations and delays to some flights were still occurring.

The National Union of Air Traffic Controllers and other unions representing controllers called the action. The controllers fear that new European Union (EU) proposals to replace national control of airspace with a joint European management program will lead to eventual privatisation. The European Transport Commissioner Loyola de Palacio has submitted the proposal known as "single skies" to EU transport ministers.

In a separate dispute, employees of Air Littoral, Air Liberté, Sabena France and Swissair France plan to strike June 30-July 1 to protest against the sale of the airlines to Swissair's SAir Group. Workers fear that the sale will result in job losses and cuts in job benefits under the new ownership.

## **Greek court rules airport workers industrial action illegal**

Airport ground staff and maintenance crews began a four-day strike on June 28 to protest against privatisation, job losses and cuts in overtime pay. Later that day, a court hearing in Athens supported a Greek Civil Aviation Authority injunction and deemed the strike illegal. The court ruled that the union would not be able to hold a strike in the future using the same demands. A union spokeswoman said that the union would consider changing its demands and sanction a further strike next week.

Staff fear that job losses could take place when Athens'

Hellenikon airport is transferred to Spata, 13 miles (21 kilometres) northeast of Athens, in March 2001. The 1,800 workers planned to walk off the job twice daily over a four-day period.

## **Norwegian local authority staff continue dispute**

Health and social workers in dispute at day-care centres in Oslo, stepped up their action this week when 107 more workers joined the strike on June 26. The escalation followed a breakdown in talks between local authority care-centre employers and union representatives the previous day. The number of local authority employees now involved in the dispute stands at 527.

On June 23, the central branch of the FO, the union representing child health aides, social workers and education employees called off its separate dispute with the local authority.

## **UK ferry officers vote for strike action in pay dispute**

Ferry officers have voted by ballot to take strike action against the P&O Company in a dispute over pay. The result of the month-long ballot was announced on June 27. The ballot was held following a breakdown in negotiations over pay. The officers rejected the P&O pay offer of a 1.2 percent increase by 265 votes to 76. They had called for a pay rise of at least double the P&O offer. The ferry workers union, Numast, has not yet set a day for strike action to begin. A spokesman stated that the union would instead meet with management next week to continue negotiations on the union's pay claim.

The officers involved in the dispute work in the fields of navigation, engineering and communications. They operate on North Sea ferries travelling out of Hull and Felixstowe, on Irish Sea ferries between Ireland and Scotland and Ireland and France, and Scottish ferries between Shetland and Orkney and the mainland. Others work on Portsmouth-based ferries to France and Spain.

## **UK railway workers vote to strike in pay dispute**

On June 26, railway workers voted to strike in opposition to a pay offer from the rail infrastructure company, Railtrack. Rail workers, members of the Rail,

Maritime and Transport workers union (RMT), voted by 1,595 to 1,352 in favour of strike action after rejecting a Railtrack pay offer of 9 percent. The union stated that the Railtrack pay deal was only worth 5 percent in real terms. RMT leaders have not set any dates for strike action and have instead called for further talks with Railtrack.

### **Irish education workers protest non-payment of wages**

On June 28, classroom assistants and secretarial staff demonstrated outside the Northern Ireland Assembly in Stormont, Belfast to protest against the non-payment of wages during school holidays. Under existing legislation the staff are also unable to claim state benefits during holiday periods.

The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) union called the demonstration. Earlier this month, Sinn Fein Education Minister Martin McGuinness had said the dispute was “complex with no quick fix”.

The union is calling for the staff to be paid a retainer fee of around 50 percent of their normal wages during school holidays. NIPSA official Patrick Mulholland said, “We feel we have to maintain the pressure because we are faced with a situation that, by this Friday, our members will be faced with no income.” Mulholland also said that the union was prepared to negotiate on the 50 percent retainer fee that it had proposed but that if the matter were not resolved shortly, there was a “very serious prospect of industrial action in the autumn”. NIPSA has 36,000 members employed in the civil and public services as well as the voluntary sector and is the largest trade union in Northern Ireland.

### **Nigerian public sector workers continue strike**

Forty-seven thousand public sector workers in Lagos State, which includes the commercial capital Lagos, are continuing their strike for higher pay. The strike entered its fifth day on Monday this week and could go nationwide. It has closed state-owned schools, shut down water supplies and virtually closed the Lagos State House of Assembly. The workers are defying a court injunction declaring the action illegal and threats by the Lagos state government that they return to their desks or be fired.

The strike followed the central government's announcement of differing minimum wages for federal and state workers. The government has offered 5,500 naira (\$55), the amount stipulated for state workers by the federal government, while the Council of Industrial Unions (COIU) are demanding a monthly minimum wage of 7,500 naira (\$75). The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC)—the national trades union body—have accepted

regional divisions, urging officials of the state chapters to negotiate independently with their respective regional governments.

The assembly is due to meet today in an emergency sitting to decide on how to proceed, but officials have warned that civil servants whose jobs are to print order papers and record the proceedings are all affected by the strike.

### **Nigerian textile workers strike for minimum wage**

Members of the National Union of Textile, Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria commenced a mobilisation last weekend for a nationwide strike to protest non-payment of the new minimum wage. This follows the breakdown of negotiations between the union and the employers association on Wednesday, resulting in the issuance of a seven-day ultimatum by the union.

While the union insisted on the 4,000 naira (\$40) basic salary as approved by the federal government, the employers were said to have offered to pay 5,540 naira (\$55) as a total package. The employers may be willing to make more concessions to avert another round of industrial action, so soon after the national strike action against the fuel price hike. Although the ultimatum expires on Friday, June 30, the union said it was still open to negotiations.

### **Botswana: Flowtite workers begin strike**

Fifty employees of Flowtite Botswana Limited began a strike Wednesday last week, demanding payment of an allowance given to other Flowtite employees in February. The company manufactures glass reinforced plastic pipes, which are exported to a number of Southern African countries, and those involved in the strike are employed in the logistics and production sections.



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