

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

27 July 2000

French pilots and engineers strike over terms of 35-hour week

Pilots and flight engineers employed by Air France took strike action on July 18, in a dispute over the implementation of the 35-hour week in the aviation industry. The strike mainly interrupted half-hourly flights from Paris to the cities of Marseille, Nice, Toulouse and Bordeaux.

Those on strike are members of the Alter and Spaf trade unions. Alter reported that 45 percent of domestic flights and 10 percent of international flights had been cancelled. Air France said that most of its domestic and international flights were unaffected by the dispute.

French brewery workers begin strike action

French brewery employees began strike action last week in opposition to closure plans by the Heineken group. The workers are based at the Adelshoffen brewery in Alsace, eastern France. Heineken said that the job losses are necessary as it intends to centralise its brewery operations at another plant.

In protest at the decision, it was reported that the workers poured nearly 150,000 pints of beer into the streets surrounding the plant. Further talks are planned between management and representatives of the workforce this week.

Italian air traffic controllers strike

On July 24, Italian air traffic controllers took strike action that resulted in the cancellation and delays of at least 200 Alitalia flights. The stoppage also affected scores of scheduled flights of other airlines.

The action involves some 3,200 controllers who are protesting at the failure of the airport authorities to implement the terms of their contract correctly.

Romanian bus workers take unofficial strike action

Bus and tram drivers in the Romanian capital Bucharest staged a wildcat strike on July 21. The seven-hour strike affected an estimated 2.5 million passengers.

The dispute was sparked over the refusal by the RATB urban transport administration to agree to the 30 percent pay increase demanded by the drivers. RATB branded the strike as illegal before offering the drivers a 10 percent increase. The strikers refused the offer but agreed to resume talks with the RATB on Friday.

Earlier in the day, around 100 unemployed miners from the western Jiu Valley coalfield arrived in Bucharest and staged a sit-in outside the government buildings to protest against the destruction of jobs throughout the region.

Gambian workers take strike action

Over 100 workers at the Sankung Sillah soap and plastic factory in Banjul, Gambia went on a sit-down strike and prevented anyone from entering the factory, accusing the owner Mr. Sillah of unfair labour practices. A spokesman for the strikers said that some of them had been working at the factory for more than 10 years and had not received salary increments or incentives. The workers also complained that they had no health care scheme or protective clothing.

South African asbestos workers win victory

Three thousand South Africans seeking damages for asbestos-related diseases won their case for the right to pursue their claim against Cape PLC, the British House of Lords has agreed. The South Africans are seeking compensation from the company whose South African subsidiary owned asbestos mines in the Northern Cape and Northern provinces in the 1970s. Cape had argued that the case should have been heard in South Africa and this had been backed last year by a British appeal court ruling. No funding would be available to take up the case in South Africa.

The House of Lords decision overturns the appeal court. Campaigners now hope they will win an out-of-court settlement as Cape's major shareholders, the insurance company Norwich and Equitable Life, are keen to stop the case going further in the courts.



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