

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

22 March 2001

Transport workers strike in Greece

Greek transport workers have held a number of strikes and other work stoppages this week, disrupting domestic flights and traffic in the Athens region.

On March 20, workers struck as part of a 24-hour strike against government plans to privatise Olympic Airways, the Greek national carrier. The airline announced this week that nine domestic flights would be cancelled due to the strike, but that international services would not be affected.

Other workers employed at the state-run national railway and Athens' transit services have held protests and short strikes of up to four hours in support of the Olympic Airways staff.

In another dispute, tour bus drivers in Athens began an indefinite strike on March 20. The drivers lined their buses along the capital's main roads in protest. The strike had an impact beyond the tourist industries, as the buses are also used to transport workers and students to hundreds of factories and private schools in the region.

Italian air traffic controllers strike in contract dispute

On March 20, Italian air traffic controllers and flight attendants began strike action over a contract dispute. The action led to the cancellation of 300 flights at Rome's main Leonardo da Vinci airport.

Dozens of other flights were also cancelled at Milan's Malpensa and Linate airports. Many of the flights were cancelled by the airlines before the strike began as it was expected to have a severe impact on their services.

UK train drivers' union to call off London Underground strike

Aslef, the UK train drivers' union has agreed to call off a planned 24-hour strike on the London Underground (LU) network, after reaching agreement with management.

On March 21, it was announced that the Aslef executive had reached a settlement with LU

management over job security, pay and conditions. Train drivers represented by the union had voted to strike on March 29, in a long-running dispute over safety and jobs. The Rail Maritime and Transport union whose members are also set to strike on March 29 as part of the same dispute has not yet made a statement about the Aslef decision.

Postal union calls off strike in South Africa

After two weeks of strike action, which caused wholesale disruption of postal services, Post Office workers in South Africa have been told by their union to return to work. The decision by Communication Workers' Union (CWU) leaders has angered many postal workers, since virtually no concessions had been won from the management.

The strike was only the second in the country's Post Office service in 99 years. It particularly affected Johannesburg and Pretoria, hitting major businesses like Medscheme, which claimed to be "losing billions of rands" as a result.

Despite its effectiveness, the CWU has capitulated to management demands that originally provoked the strike. Instead of the Sunday premium of triple pay, some regular Sunday workers will receive time-and-a-half payment with others receiving double time. A one-off payment of R2,500 will be made to about 900 workers, who had been receiving the higher rate. An additional payment of R2,500 will be conditional on "the Post Office's profitability".

Having backed down in the first important change to postal workers' conditions, the way is now open for management to press ahead with restructuring the service in readiness for privatisation.



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