Workers Struggles: Europe, The Middle East and Africa

13 December 2001

Strike breakers used against airport baggage handler's strike in Dublin

Strike breakers from Britain and Northern Ireland were used to avert disruption to passenger services as a result of strike action by 270 Servisair workers.

The baggage handlers served strike notice under the Irish Republic's labour laws last week after management announced 13 job cuts and put the entire operational staff on protective notice. Management is demanding that loading and baggage staff interchange between cargo and passenger aircraft as required. Objecting to the demands, the workers pointed out that the proposal would mean them working five out of every six Sundays.

Tensions increased as 100 scabs were brought in from Belfast and Manchester and staff occupied the canteen in protest.

The company, which handles check-in and baggage processing for Continental, Delta and British Airways, together with a range of charter companies including Spanair, Monarch and Airtours, said it had suspended staff who had refused to work specific rosters.

Manchester Airport security staff to be balloted over job losses

Security staff at Manchester Airport, northern England are to be balloted for strike action over the loss of between 100 and 140 permanent employees at the site. In addition, temporary staff recruited for busy summer periods will no longer be hired.

Airport managers claim the move will increase efficiency, but union leaders say it will compromise safety and security at the airport. The workers are also protesting arrangements to take on new staff at lower pay rates.

Ballot results are to be announced on December 21.

French air traffic controllers strike leads to cancellation of many flights

A 36-hour strike by French air traffic controllers' ended on December 7. The industrial action was held as part of a campaign to oppose a plan by the European Union to restructure Europe's air traffic control system. The EU's "single sky" plan, would essentially end nationally run air traffic control and the French workers fear that safety and job security would be affected by the changes and lead eventually to the privatisation of civil aviation.

The strikes forced the cancellation of hundreds of flights to and from France by the major airlines in Europe. Air France cancelled 85 percent of services to domestic and European destinations. France's civil aviation authority reported that some 90 percent of flights over French airspace would be affected. British Airways had to cancel 93 flights and was only operating four flights between Britain and France.

Scottish janitors strike over bonus scheme

Janitors' in the Scottish capital city of Edinburgh began a strike on December 3 in a dispute over their "irregular hours allowance" bonus scheme. The scheme can increase the janitors basic by more than seven percent. Unions involved in the dispute say that the bonus should be paid to primary school janitors as well as the secondary school janitors who it is currently paid to.

The dispute involves some 130 janitors and has led to the temporary or partial closure of 18 schools run by Edinburgh City Council. More than 4,000 children attend these schools.

Edinburgh City Council has said it considers the strike to be illegal but it would accept an invitation by the arbitration service ACAS to become involved in the dispute.

Thousands of Turkish workers march against job cuts

Up to 20,000 workers marched in rallies across the country on Saturday in response to the government's failure to ease a crippling financial crisis that has already cost a million jobs.

Since Turkey plunged into a deep economic crisis in February the lira has plummeted around 60 percent against the dollar.

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Thousands of workers from various labour unions demonstrated in Istanbul, Ankara and several other Turkish cities. They called on the government to step down and threatened a nation wide strike if it continued to follow the prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund. The IMF is urging Turkey to cut state spending and lay off more workers. The government deployed 7,000 riot police in Istanbul alone during the strike action.

Nigerian doctors on strike for year-old agreement

Doctors in Katsina State, Nigeria have been on strike for over a week. The strike is in protest against the failure of the state government to implement an agreement signed between their union, the Nigeria Medical Association (NMA) and the Federal Government last year. Most other state governments and the federal government have now implemented the agreement. The Katsina strikers have vowed to continue their action until their demands are met.

Dr. Hamza, the Acting Chairman of the Katsina State branch of the NMA, said that what the state government had offered to the doctors was far short of what had been agreed nationally, and was therefore unacceptable. The union has expressed its willingness to accept a modified agreement, which Dr Hamza described as "legitimate and reasonable", but this has been rejected by the state government. The union has appealed to traditional rulers and other establishment figures to intervene to bring the stand-off to an end.

Local government workers told to end strike

The Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) has suspended its six-week long national strike. The action was in protest against the federal government's policy of "zero allocation" of funds to some local councils to cover teachers' salaries. NULGE officials claim that this policy has resulted in 285 local councils owing workers between two and 22 months salary.

In an attempt to resolve the crisis, Senate President, Chief Anyim Pius Anyim, convened an Inter-Ministerial Conference on December 6 to discuss the demands with the union. The conference, which was presided over by the senate president, resolved that the Federal Ministry of Finance should set up a committee of "stakeholders" to determine the accurate number of teachers, the amount that should be paid for their salaries and the extent of over-deductions from Local Governments

Anyim, using the vaguest possible language, said that the Inter-Ministerial Committee should look into the possibility of making an interim arrangement to lessen the problems of the workers' salary arrears, and review the Universal Basic Education (UBE) bill and the new Revenue Allocation formula bill. No assurance was given on the payment of primary school teachers' salaries, the problem of zero allocation and the huge backlog of salary arrears totaling N8.3 billion (1N = $0.08) that were the issues behind the strike. All that as promised was an "investigation".

At the same meeting Finance Minister, Malam Adamu Ciroma, denounced the local government workers' claim for the payment of 22-month salary arrears as illegal and said that the government had no provision out of which the money could be paid. He said that he would not embark on any act of illegality by disbursing funds not approved by law.

Speaking to the media in Abuja on December 7, the National President of NULGE, Deji Akinwalere, defended the suspension of the six-week strike. The decision "was on the basis of the various interventions of concerned people — traditional rulers, members of the international community, the press, religious leaders and leadership of the Senate, " he claimed.

Steel workers on strike in South Africa

Steel workers at the Vanderbijlpark steel mill in South Africa are on strike against job losses. Dumisa Ntuli, spokesperson of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) said there was a potential loss of 2, 500 jobs. The union claims that 5, 000 workers have taken action, while the company claims that only 250 are on strike.

The proposed "restructuring" is a result of last month's split-off of the highly profitable mining division, Kumba Resources, by Iscor (the largest South African iron and steel group). Ntuli announced that the union has issued a memorandum demanding a moratorium on job cuts. He said the union would meet in the coming week to decide on further action, which could include extending the strike to other plants.

Iscor made a statement that the job cuts were necessary to ensure Vanderbijlpark remained a low-cost producer in a global market where there was a glut of cheap steel.

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