

Workers Struggles: Europe

21 February 2002

French protesters halt distribution of new free newspaper

Workers this week halted the distribution of the debut edition of the *Metro* newspaper in Marseille, France. The workers are members of the CGT-Filpac union. The paper is produced and distributed by non-union labour.

On February 18 about 40 members of the union went to the warehouse where 50,000 copies of the *Metro* were stored and scattered the newspapers on the ground. The Marseille edition did eventually leave the premises under a police escort. Metro International, the Swedish group that owns the newspaper, avoided similar action in Paris by printing 200,000 copies of the paper in Luxembourg overnight. However in at least one incident, protesters managed to seize two lorry loads of the paper and throw them onto the street.

Marc Pinci, a representative of CGT-Filpac, said; "Workers are in a state of legitimate defence because *Metro* respects nothing, respects no press rules." The union is also against what it alleges to be the use of "people in precarious situations" to distribute the newspapers. Pinci added that more action against the newspaper "cannot be excluded."

A *Metro* spokesman told BBC News Online; "We were given some advance warning that we were going to face problems in France and have been working out ways to get around them...we've seen hostility to the paper before, but never on this scale." *Metro*, which has become a fixture at bus stops, on trains and on the underground in 21 other cities worldwide, boasts some nine million readers in total. It is directed particularly toward a younger market that would not normally pay for a newspaper. It generates its revenue from advertising. While traditional newspapers incur large circulation costs by deliveries to shops, newsstands homes and offices, Metro avoids such overheads by bulk delivery, often to local public transport stations.

German airline pilots vote to strike to demand pay

increase

Pilots employed by the German airline Lufthansa's regional carrier, City-Line, have voted to take industrial action in a pay dispute. On February 15, pilots and co-pilots voted 97.5 percent in favour of holding strike action in pursuit of their pay claim. The City-Line pilots are members of the Cockpit trade union and their main demand is for a pay increase in line with their fellow workers at Lufthansa. Some 650 pilots and co-pilots are involved in the dispute. Were a strike to take place it would disrupt journeys to 21 European destinations from 13 German airports. The union has warned that any forthcoming strike action could start at any given time and without prior warning. Michael Mages, the chief for the union, said on February 17, "We will only inform the public once the strike starts."

Greek journalist protest wins support

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and its European regional group last week called on journalists throughout the continent to give their support to Greek journalists who held nation-wide strike actions in Greek newspapers and newsrooms on February 7 in response to a wave of sackings.

The Greek journalists, in coordination with trade unions in the media, have launched a campaign under the slogan; "The news is not a commodity, journalists are not disposable," to highlight the growing concern within journalism that employers are looking for drastic cuts in news services to confront economic difficulties.

Greek journalists have been involved in a series of actions in recent months to highlight the problems facing journalists and media workers in Greece. Fierce competition between media outlets and cost cutting in newsrooms has led to job cuts and widespread violations of existing collective agreements. Journalists in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom have all recently been involved in actions to defend existing standards.

Aidan White, General Secretary of the IFJ and the

European Federation of Journalists, said; “This is the second time within two months that Greek journalists and other media workers will go on a strike. This reflects the strong will to defend jobs and to demand higher quality in media content in Greece. Journalists throughout Europe strongly support this campaign.”

Clerical workers at rail company in England to strike over pay

Station and office staff employed by Arriva Trains Northern, that operates trains in the north of England, are to strike for two days on March 1 and 2 in a dispute over pay. The 170 staff supported a ballot for industrial action by a majority of 87 percent. The station and office staff are members of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) and their strike will be the first by the union over pay in more than 30 years. The union claims that its members have been offered a pay increase of only 3 percent, compared to a wage increase of 18 percent for train drivers. The action is set to coincide with that of the company’s rail conductors, who are also in a dispute over pay. The conductors are members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union.

English Heritage workers to hold national strike to protest low pay

Workers employed by English Heritage are to strike on March 11 in a dispute over the imposition of a minimal pay increase. The staff are employed at numerous historic tourist attractions such as Stonehenge and Warwick Castle and are protesting at the company’s decision to increase their pay by just 3.5 percent. The Prospect trade union has said that the pay deal will leave the workers on an average of 10 percent less than other government employed workers. Prospect has also drawn attention to the fact that English Heritage has withdrawn £500,000 from its payroll budget in order to spend it on advertising campaigns. Hundreds of workers at many of the historic sites are expected to participate in the industrial action.

Workers at Manchester Airport in England continue campaign to defend safety conditions

More than 1,000 workers at Manchester Airport in the north-west of England are set to hold a 36-hour work stoppage this week in an ongoing dispute over safety measures. The strike is to be held on February 22 and 23 and will involve security staff, car-park attendants, desk staff and bus drivers at the airport. The Transport and General Workers Union regional secretary for the

north-west, Dave McCall, said of the proposed strike, “This is a direct response to management failure to take seriously the action we have taken so far. There was a unanimous call for members to step up action, and to step it up dramatically.” A spokesman for Manchester Airport said it had “robust contingency plans” to counter any strike action.



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