

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

4 April 2002

Doctors' dispute continues in France

The ongoing strike by independent general practitioners and specialists continued in France over the Easter holiday. Practises throughout the country were closed. Doctors struck for three days over Easter and further days of strikes and other protest actions are planned.

On March 27 Michel Chassang, the leader of CSMF trade union, attacked the government and health insurance schemes and said that lack of funds available to doctors has created conditions of financial hardship. He added that a "hot spring" was now underway.

The health strike has become a major issue of debate during the current election campaign in France. Candidates from the left and the right have gone on record supporting the demands of the doctors and opinion polls show that the majority of the population also support the doctors' demands.

In France doctors have their own independent practices. The consultations, treatments and visits at home that they provide are paid for by the health insurance schemes. Employers and privately insured people pay into these schemes.

French dentists rolling dispute continues

On March 28, the rolling strikes by dentists in France continued in Paris and the region of Ile-de-France. Dentists are calling for a re-evaluation of the fees that they are paid.

The action has been called by the CNSD trade union (Confédération nationale des syndicats dentaires), a federation of 99 regional dentist trade unions. The union represents some 18,000 dentists.

Public transport staff in Lyon take strike action

A strike by public transport staff in Lyon continued last week. The strike began on March 20. No agreement was reached following two subsequent meetings between management and trade unions on March 29. Over the holiday weekend the strike resulted in a reduced service being provided by the Lyon TCL (Transports en commun de Lyon).

Tram and bus workers in Grenoble, France strike

On March 28, tram and bus workers in Grenoble, France took strike action as the result of a violent threat by a passenger against a tramway conductor. All trams were

stopped and only 30 of the 180 buses ran.

Strike called at Air Lib in France

On April 1, six trade unions called a 24-hour strike at the Air Lib airline in France. The action involved staff including pilots and flight attendants who are demanding a joint industrial and social plan that assures permanent employment. They are also calling for transparency in the financial management of the company and acceptable compensation in the case of dismissals.

The workers are opposed to different conditions and treatment for the pilots who came from AOM to those from Air Liberté.

Air Lib was created from the merger of AOM and Air Liberté and is struggling with debts. The company recently introduced a low cost airfare sector as part of its survival package.

Air France workers at Marseille-Provence airport strike

On March 27, 27 flights were cancelled at the Marseille-Provence airport after the trade union FO (Force Ouvrière) called on employees of Air France to strike in protest against the existing wages and working hours.

Italian trade unions call general strike

The leaders of the three main Italian trade unions have announced that an eight-hour general strike will be held on April 16. The unions represent about 12 million workers in all sectors. The strike has been called to protest against plans by the government that will make it easier for employers to lay off and sack workers.

The Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi stated this week that he was ready to continue negotiations with the trade unions following the April 16 strike. He said this week that, "Now there is a general strike, but after that day, which has become symbolic for the unions, I want to say publicly that the government is ready for dialogue."

German engineering staff stage warning strikes in Lower Saxony and Bavaria

German engineering workers began a series of "warning strikes" on April 2 to demand an increase in pay. Some 1,300 members of the IG Metall union took strike action at nine plants in the states of Lower Saxony and Bavaria. The workers are mainly employed at electronics firms and auto

parts suppliers.

The union is calling for a pay increase of around 6.5 percent. IG Metall represents about 2.7 million engineering, automaking and electronics workers. The strikes are Germany's first full-scale disputes over pay in six years. Further strikes are planned for later this week, while IG Metall officials and employers are set to continue negotiations on April 8.

Security staff strike at Manchester Airport, England

Five hundred security staff at Manchester Airport in the north west of England held strike action for four days over the Easter holiday. The dispute is now in its eighth week. Workers oppose new contracts that would result in pay cuts and changes to their current shifts and rosters.

The striking staff are members of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU). While the strike did result in some delays, no flights were cancelled at the airport. Manchester airport management said that security at the airport would not be compromised during the strike and that, "Contingency plans are in place and extra security staff drafted in."

TGWU regional secretary Dave McCall said of the strike action, "We reject and continue to reject attempts by Manchester Airport to have a cut-priced service based on burger bar rates of pay."

Workers strike at SA metal refinery plant

Workers at the Rustenburg Base Metals (RBM) refinery in South Africa went on strike last week, in opposition to a proposed new medical scheme. The dispute began when the company, a subsidiary of Anglo American Platinum Corporation, changed from the Good Hope Medical Aid Scheme, which covered both workers and members of their extended families, to an in-house scheme which only covered the workers. The new scheme also removes the workers' right to see a doctor of their choice.

The company sought an interdict against 875 workers belonging to the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) claiming the strike was illegal.

Dumisa Ntuli, an Numsa spokesman, accused the company of being irresponsible by imposing the new medical scheme. But he urged workers to return to work.

As a result of the combined pressure of the union, the company and the courts, the workers returned to work on March 28. The new in-house scheme became operational on April 1 and the NUM regional secretary now says the unions will apply to hold a legal strike against it.

Air traffic controllers strike in Kenya

A go-slow by Kenyan air traffic controllers, which began on March 29, turned into an indefinite strike on Saturday. The strikers threatened to close down Kenyan airspace

unless the government met their demands—that the Directorate of Civil Aviation (DCA) is de-linked from the government and that technical staff be paid Sh100, 000 (US\$1,300), with a Sh33, 000 house allowance. In addition, the airport staff are demanding an aviation allowance equivalent of 80 percent of their basic pay.

One hundred and twenty-five air traffic controllers were suspended on Saturday evening, following a meeting of union representatives with the DCA and senior government officials. The meeting failed to resolve the dispute and in response, the strikers threatened to close down Kenyan airspace. The union leaders said the strikers would not return to work until their demands were met. They also said the suspensions were out of order since they had received neither written warnings nor suspension letters prior to the action.

In an attempt to break the strike in Nairobi, the authorities are using managers and trainees from the School of Aviation to control air traffic. In Mombasa six managers are controlling the airspace by working 12-hour shifts of two officers at a time. Last Sunday the director of Civil Aviation, Mr Kuto, said there was no cause for panic because the DCA was in "full control". Junior DCA staff have warned that Kenyan airspace is not safe because it is being manned by staff who are both inexperienced and overworked. One of the managers said anonymously that before long "we will not cope with the work load."

Algeria Berber strike enters second day

On April 2 the BBC World Service reported that shops, banks and post offices in the north-eastern Kabylie region of Algeria had been closed for two days as protest strike action against last month's repeated clashes between riot police and Berber activists, in which five people have died, continued.

The strikers are demanding democratic reform. They are also demanding that the security forces end their occupation of the Berber headquarters in the regional capital, Tizi Ouzo.



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