Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

11 April 2002

German engineering and electrical workers continue strikes in pay dispute

More than 60,000 engineering and electrical workers in Germany are to take strike action this week in their ongoing campaign over pay.

The warning strikes have been called by the IG Metall trade union and workers will walk off the job in five separate regions of the country.

On April 8, 10,000 workers took strike action at the automaker DaimlerChrysler. Workers are calling for a pay increase of 6.5 percent, while the employers' federations are offering an increase of just 2 percent. The union has stated that it may call a strike ballot of all its members if a negotiated settlement is not reached within two weeks.

French transport workers strike continues

The public transport workers strike in Lyon in France continued this week. On April 9, the 21st day of the strike, only 41 percent of the buses drove. The Métro and tramway services were both operating as normal. Workers are calling for a pay increase of 3.2 percent, while management are offering 2 percent.

On April 8, a blockade of bus depots was lifted by the trade union involved in the dispute. The blockade was first set up on April 4 and led to a complete halt to bus traffic in the city and also affected Métro and tramway traffic. As a result of the blockade, 62 employees appeared before a tribunal in Lyon where they were charged with "attacking the liberty of work".

On the evening of April 7, unions held a further meeting with the transport authority management to discuss the dispute. They were unable to reach a settlement in the negotiations and the strike continues.

French part-time workers continue strikes for better pay, job security

Strikes have continued in the last week in France in an ongoing campaign against temporary, part-time and unstable jobs. Over the last few months, workers at firms such as Fnac, Virgin, GO-Sports and McDonalds have held a number of strikes and other protests. These strikes have been held in Paris as well as other towns and cities. Many of these workers are on temporary contracts, with low pay and have less employment rights than full-time staff.

On April 6, employees blocked the entrance of the popular Virgin Megastore in Paris. The action was called by the CGT trade union and was the third such strike in the last week. Staff are demanding a general increase in the wages of all employees, as well as the payment of a thirteenth month. An agreement is already in place from April 4 in relation to this latter demand.

At GO-Sport, the FO union called new protest actions to demand an increase in wages. In February the CFTC trade union and management reached an agreement covering staff in some GO-Sport shops. Following this, further strikes took place on March 9 to demand increases in pay for all GO-Sport workers.

At the McDonalds restaurant on the boulevard Saint Germain, workers are currently involved in a dispute to defend the rights of five trade unionists who were sacked by the company. There is an ongoing dispute for an increase in pay at the McDonalds on the Champs Elysées.

Workers employed at the Fnac store on the Champs Elysées began a campaign for better pay and conditions in February. The store is situated on the famous boulevard in the city that has earned the title, *La plus belle rue de la précarité* —the nicest street of insecurity. The campaign by the workers led to a pay increase, their first collective rise since 1993. Workers at other Fnac stores in Paris and other regions are now developing a campaign to win a pay increase.

Customs staff strike continues in France

Customs staff in France continued their strike to demand a danger premium pay increase and better pension conditions last week. Trade unions involved in the dispute include the CFDT, CGT, FO, SPNDF and SUD.

On April 3 a national strike was held and some 100 custom officers blocked the French-Spanish border of Perthus. Another 50 workers blocked the border of France and Andorra. On April 5, four of the workers chained themselves to the track at Calais in order to prevent trains from leaving. The action delayed all Eurostar trains that travel on the Eurotunnel between Paris and London. The CRS riot police eventually removed the workers from the tracks.

Workers have also held strike action and protests in Nice, Cannes Menton, Virsac and Melles and at the airports of

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Nice, Toulouse and Bordeaux-Mérignac. Unions have now called on customs staff to occupy the regional customs administration centres.

Railway conductors in London, England vote to strike

Railway conductors employed by Silverlink in London, England have voted to take strike action in a dispute over pay. The strike ballot result was announced on April 4. Prior to the ballot, workers twice voted to reject pay offers from the company. The last offer was for a two year period with a 3.3 percent increase this year and at least 3 percent next year.

The workers are members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union and voted by a majority of 64 votes to 56 to support industrial action.

Silverlink runs services across the North London area and also from London to the Midlands.

Train drivers in the north of England strike over disciplinary dispute

Train drivers employed by First North Western held a third one-day strike on April 8 in a dispute over disciplinary action taken against one of the workers.

The strike led to the cancellation of the 1,500 train services run by the company in the busy north west of England. The strike involves 700 drivers. They voted by a majority of more than 10 to one in favour of holding the three strikes to protest against the sacking of a driver. The first of the two strikes was held last week. The workers are member of the train drivers union, Aslef.

Kenyan government attacks air traffic control strike

Despite sustained government intimidation and violence, the Kenyan air traffic controllers are continuing their strike that began on March 31.

At least thirteen strikers were arrested in Nairobi on April 8. Eight other strikers appeared before a court in the second largest city, Mombasa, on charges of incitement. They were picked up by police from their homes. Some strikers have been forced to go into hiding.

The government has sacked 76 of the striking air traffic controllers and suspended 192. They were given notice on April 8 to leave their government-owned houses by 6 o'clock that evening. Transport and Communications Permanent Secretary Sammy Kyungu declared they were no longer government employees.

The government statement was made within hours of the police attack on a meeting in Uhuru Park of the strikers, including air traffic controllers, telecommunication officers and others. The police arrived in two lorries and attacked the meeting with tear gas, forcing people to run for safety. Some had to dive into the water in the park to avoid arrest. Park attendants and bystanders had to flee to escape the tear gas and the threat of arrest. Armed policemen pushed those caught into a waiting lorry.

The strikers had already complained of police harassment, after one of their colleagues, Ruriani Micheni, was arrested and taken to Jomo Kenyatta Airport Police Station at 6am. When the strikers decided to protest the imprisonment, the police moved in to attack them.

Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi made a statement at the weekend calling on air traffic controllers from neighbouring countries to replace their "unpatriotic" colleagues in Kenya. He also called on retired Kenyan air traffic controllers to scab—45 have done so. The BBC correspondent in Nairobi reported that there are fears about safety because the pensioners may not be familiar with the latest technology. Senior managers have been manning the control towers to prevent delays in international flights. Despite the president's direct role in attacking the strike, union leaders claim that his actions indicate that he was not properly informed about their demands.

The strikers are demanding 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 strikers are calling for an aviation allowance equivalent to 80 percent of their basic pay. The strikers claim that they fear for their safety and that they are being followed. They have been threatened with arrest if they visit newspaper offices in the town.

Zimbabwean shoe workers strike for promised pay rise

Over 3,000 workers at the Bata Shoe Company factory in Gweru, Zimbabwe, went on strike on April 9 to protest the company's refusal to honour a 27 percent salary increase for all employees agreed to last November and due to have been paid from January. The company claims that it can no longer afford the salary increase.

Riot police were called in against the strikers, after the car of a senior company official was overturned. The strike action has brought the company to a standstill.

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