

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

16 May 2002

Air traffic controllers in Rome strike

Air traffic controllers took strike action at a number of airports in Italy on May 13. The workers are in a long running dispute over the terms of their contract. The strike lasted four hours and involved air traffic controllers at Rome's Leonardo da Vinci Airport hub and airports in Florence, Naples, Pisa, Sardinia and Sicily. An estimated 13,000 airline passengers were affected by delays as a result of the strike action in Rome.

Security staff at Belfast Airport, Ireland call off strike

Industrial action by security staff at Belfast International Airport was called off just four hours after it began on May 8. The Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union suspended the action following an offer by the subcontractor, International Consultants of Targeted Security, to reopen negotiations. The strike involved 114 staff and was to be the first of a number of "discretionary stoppages" over the next 10 days.

The security staff held the strike action in protest at what they term "second rate wages". Security staff at airports in England are paid higher wages, for example, security staff at Luton Airport are paid £20,000 a year. Shop steward Gordon McNeill said the Belfast workers are paid just £5.20 an hour, with no overtime rates and no sick pay. He said the union was calling for an increase to £6.50 an hour, overtime rates and sick pay. McNeill said that the security staff had been offered a pay increase of just 18 pence an hour. The new negotiations on the dispute are to be held jointly with the Labour Relations Agency.

Packaging manufacturing workers strike in France

Workers manufacturing packaging and cartons began strike action on May 7, in a dispute over the planned closure of their factory in Valmont, Lorraine. The workers are employed by COPACARTON, a branch of the German owned COPA company. COPA intends to close the factory on December 31.

SONACOTRA workers in France strike

The CFE-CGE, CFTC, CGT and SUD trade unions in France called on members of the SONACOTRA organisation to hold a strike beginning on May 6.

SONACOTRA is a national organisation that organises, builds or buys lodgings for poor people including immigrants and temporarily unemployed people. The strike was called to protest against the worsening of working conditions. Workers are demanding that more staff are recruited, a wage rise of about four percent and an annual premium of three percent. The strike call was supported by 98 percent of the workers at SONACOTRA.

French independent doctors' dispute continues

This week, the president of the major medical union in France, Michel Chassang, announced that the ongoing campaign of industrial action by independent general and specialist doctors would continue. Chassang said that the majority of doctors' practices would close from May 18 to May 20.

The doctors are demanding an increase in the fees they are paid for patient consultations. These fees are paid out of the CNAM national insurance schemes. Jean-Marie Spaeth, president of the CNAM, is a member of the Socialist Party and connected to the trade union CFDT. Spaeth says that the financial demands of the doctors would cost 945 million euros per year. The new French health minister, Jean-Francois Mattei, said before his appointment that doctors had a legitimate case. As yet his government has not made any definitive attempts to resolve the dispute.

German workers continue strike

On May 14, more than 16,000 members of the IG Metall trade union in Germany took strike action in an ongoing dispute to demand a pay increase.

Thirteen thousand workers walked off the job at 22 companies in the southwestern state of Baden-Württemberg. Among the companies hit by the strike action were the Stuttgart plant of auto manufacturer Porsche, auto supplier Oxford Automotive, tractor maker John Deere and aluminium processors Alcan Singen and Lawson Mardon Singen.

A further 3,600 workers took strike action in Berlin and the surrounding state of Brandenburg in a second day of industrial action targeted by region. The strikes went ahead despite union and employers' representatives in Baden-

Württemberg agreeing on May 13 to resume negotiations that had broken down on April 19.

IG Metall originally called for an increase in pay of 6.5 percent and has since lowered that demand. When the negotiations failed, the employers associations had offered a pay increase of 3.3 percent over 15 months. The union at that point was willing to accept an increase of 4 percent. The union has since lowered its demand once again and its vice president, Juergen Peters, said this week that an increase of 3.8 percent over 10 months would be acceptable calling it a “relatively high” pay deal for the workers.

Israeli teachers propose strike to oppose firing of 1,500

The Histadrut Teachers Union and the Secondary School Teachers Union, the two main teachers unions in Israel, have stated that they will fight the decision by the Education Ministry, made earlier this week, to fire 1,500 teachers next year and to impose a hiring freeze as the result of a NIS 480 million budget cut.

The Secondary School Teachers Union anticipates another 1,000 supplementary teachers whose salaries are paid for by the local authorities will also be sacked. A reduction in 40,000 hours of class time is also anticipated.

The Secondary Schools Teachers’ Association spokeswoman, Yael Taina-Shafir, said; “Since the state was founded, there has never been such a large budget cut.” The closest education cuts to the present proposals were implemented in 1985 when 19,000 class hours were cut. Since the 2002 budget was first announced last autumn, under mounting pressure in the Education Ministry cuts in the education budget had decreased from NIS 660 million to NIS 478 million to NIS 380 million. But budget cuts announced in February brought the figure back up to NIS 480 million. Further cuts are anticipated.

Kenyan relief maize stuck following pay strike

More than 200 casual labourers went on strike in Kenya last week in protest at the conditions and pay for loading relief food as part of the United Nation’s World Food Programme (WFP). The employees of Blue Cat Services were forced to work without dust masks or any other protective wear. They were being paid only five cents for each 50 kg sack and ten cents for each 90 kg sack that they filled, stitched and loaded onto trucks.

Blue Cat Services work under contract for Grain Bulk Handling Limited (GBHL) to deal with all aspects of packing and transportation of the maize, as well as the cleaning services, painting and garbage disposal. A consignment of relief food for the WFP, off loaded from the ship MV Liberty Spirit at the port in Mombasa into silos of GBHL, was due to be loaded onto lorries. The labourers camped outside the gates of GBHL premises near the port, and refused to return to work until management agreed to a

pay increase.

Kenya’s president threatens teachers

President Moi is threatening Kenya’s teachers with the sack if they go ahead with their planned strike next month. Following the recent dismissal of striking air traffic controllers, Moi is clamping down on all public sector workers. He told teachers to “shun arrogance and humble yourselves for the sake of students”, and that they “should know that there are 60,000 of their colleagues who are unemployed”. On Saturday, the secretary-general of the Kenya National Union of Teachers, Francis Ng’ang’a, said the strike would go ahead on June 10, “if no agreement is reached by then”. The union is currently seeking negotiations with the government.

South African mineworkers strike over pay

Over 250 miners at the Kalgold mine in Mafikeng, South Africa went on strike last week to demand an increase in the company pay offer of 5.5 percent. The miners, members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), are demanding a 12 percent increase as well as a housing allowance to bring them into line with other mines, and a transport allowance of R700.

Their strike action has been given the legal right to proceed by the South African Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration after negotiations that had continued since last January with the mine owners, Harmony Gold Mining, broke down. A statement from the company claimed that the strike was illegal and warned that the miners would be locked out.

The NUM issued a statement calling for the implementation by Harmony of their national demand that the minimum monthly wage for the lowest earner should be at least R2,000 (\$US200). Two hundred and sixty NUM members are being balloted at a Cape Concrete plant on the Cape Peninsula for strike action after negotiations broke down. The union is calling for a 10 percent wage increase to obtain the minimum wage level of R2,000. The company has offered only five percent.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact