

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

7 April 2006

## Europe

### German air traffic controllers announce planned strikes

The German air traffic controllers' trade union announced March 28 that it could stage strikes during the 2006 World Cup Football Championships in Germany in opposition to plans to privatise the air traffic control network.

The government wants to sell 75 percent of its shares in the Deutsche Flugsicherung GmbH (DFS), which is currently state-owned, by the end of this year. It is currently in the midst of negotiations with the trade union on rationalisation measures and flexibility in working hours. The union has said that any postponement of talks could lead to industrial action during the games.

### Metal workers join Germany's public service strikers

As a public service strike continues into its eighth week in southern Germany and on the heels of a health care sector strike, thousands of metal workers downed tools on March 29.

A month-long truce expired on March 29 that had covered the period since the end of the last salary agreement. Over 10,000 workers in several factories started warning strikes at midnight, according to their union, IG Metall. They are demanding wage increases of 5 percent for the 3.4 million workers in industries ranging from car production to semiconductors. The aim of the action is to put pressure on employers as negotiations over the union's demands have stalled.

Around 3,600 workers struck for short periods in North Rhine-Westphalia. At the central demonstration in front of the Ford factory in Saarlouis, in the state of Saarland, 3,000 workers from 10 companies gathered for a rally, leaving their posts unattended for an hour. In Bavaria, 1,400 workers from 14 companies, including Osram, MAN-Roland, EADS, Epcos, Infineon and Bosch, participated in protests.

The metal workers strike continued the next day, March 30. The union said around 160,000 workers had taken part in the strikes since they began. Thirty thousand workers were estimated to have taken strike action in the southern state of Bavaria alone, including several thousand at a factory of the BMW carmaker in the Bavarian town of Dingolfing.

At DaimlerChrysler in Düsseldorf around 1,000 workers left their positions to take part in a torch-light demonstration.

One of the biggest single demonstrations was held outside a production plant of DaimlerChrysler in the southern city of Sindelfingen, where 12,000 workers gathered.

Meanwhile DaimlerChrysler has approved plans to end production of its NedCar—a four-seater version of its Smart cars—at Born in the Netherlands. The plant also makes the Mitsubishi Colt model and formal closure talks are to start soon.

### Irish employment training staff strike

Around 50 FÁS (training and employment agency) employees picketed outside the agency's headquarters on Dublin's Baggot Street April 5 in opposition to government plans to decentralize the agency to Birr, County Offaly.

Pickets were also mobilised at three other Dublin offices in Clyde Road, South Circular Road and Peter Street.

Subsequently, 10 hours of talks at the Labour Relations Commission failed to resolve the dispute. It is understood that while a management

proposal to resume talks was acceptable to the union, it was subsequently withdrawn and redrafted.

### Further UK public sector strikes planned over pensions dispute

Public sector unions have announced three days of strike action this month to continue the protest over council workers' pensions. The strike action is to be staggered. Officials of the public sector union Unison say council staff in the south of England will strike on April 25; those in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will walk out on April 26; and workers in the north of England and the Midlands will strike on April 27.

A national strike day involving hundreds of thousands of council workers on March 28 was ignored by the government, as ministers insisted that the 85-year rule will be scrapped on October 1. (The rule allows anyone whose combined age and years of service add up to 85 to retire at age 60).

### UK television news journalists to strike

Journalists working for most of Independent Television's (ITV) regional newsrooms are to hold a one-day strike on April 18 over pay. More than 300 members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) in England and Wales, all working outside of London, will be involved.

The NUJ said members had "no option" but to strike and warned that further industrial action was likely.

The broadcaster reported a 36 percent rise in annual profits earlier in March and unveiled plans to launch new "participation TV" channel ITV Play.

### London city cleaners threaten strike action over pay and conditions

Cleaners in London represented by the Transport and General Workers Union have said they will ballot for strike action over low pay and working conditions. Cleaners working on minimal pay and conditions are employed at a number of high-profile City institutions, including Reuters Group PLC, the Financial Services Authority, Morgan Stanley, Barclays PLC and the Bank of America. In many cases they are fighting for a living wage, sick pay, improved holidays and a decent pension.

### BBC workers vote triggers ballot on strike action

Union members employed in the British Broadcasting Corporation's Human Resources voted March 28 by 85 percent to ballot for industrial action. The ballot is over plans to outsource the department to the private company, Capita. An earlier vote, which returned unanimous opposition to outsourcing, triggered the ballot for industrial action. Workers want to be guaranteed the right to continue working on their BBC contracts or to be offered redundancy, but Capita is refusing to offer any such promise.

### Manchester journalists to ballot for strike action

Editorial staff at the *Manchester Evening News* are to ballot for industrial action if they fail to reach agreement over shift changes at the paper. A previous ballot attempt was suspended after management revealed that compulsory redundancies would not be necessary as changes to the way the paper operated were implemented. Twenty-seven editorial posts were cut in February, with another 25 volunteering for redundancy.

However staff have turned down the latest offer from the company to bring in flexible hours, including evening shifts for new edition times, and the process is now with the labour conciliation service ACAS to try to reach a compromise.

The ballot on whether to take industrial action would take place if the

ACAS talks are unsuccessful.

News staff want assurances on the number and frequency of the new evening shifts they would have to work, and a new pay deal to reflect the change of hours.

#### **UK paper mill workers prepare to take further strike action**

Workers at Inverurie's International Paper mill in northeast England staged a second walkout in a week on March 30 over a pay-freeze dispute and prepared for a major escalation of the strike. Engineering union members on one shift stopped work two hours early, mounting picket lines that remained in place until 8 p.m. and which colleagues on the scheduled 6 p.m. shift refused to cross. A poll of the union's 231 members at the mill voted four to one in favour of industrial action this month after lengthy talks over a pay freeze and a 2 percent one-off settlement offer remained deadlocked.

#### **College lecturers vote for strike action**

The college lecturers' union Natfhe has called a two-day strike after rejecting a pay rise offer of 1.5 percent as "insulting" and below the rate of inflation. The strike is scheduled for May 2 and 3, and could coincide with public sector action over pensions.

In a ballot of Natfhe members in November last year, 71 percent of those taking part voted for a campaign to improve pay.

Meanwhile, unions representing higher education academics have warned that a marking boycott is "starting to bite" and potentially will disrupt thousands of students' final university exams. The boycott began last month, following a UK-wide strike on March 7.

Lecturers say their income has fallen in recent years compared with that of other professionals. The Association of University Teachers and Natfhe are calling for a 20 percent pay rise over three years, but have been offered 6 percent over two years.

University employers have ruled out pay talks until the unions agree to suspend the boycott of exam and coursework marking during negotiations.

#### **Polish gas workers to strike if government dishonours share agreement**

Workers at PGNiG, Poland's gas monopoly, have given the Ministry of the Treasury until April 20 to honour an agreement for the workforce to be given part of the company's shares.

Wojciech Jasinski, the Polish treasury minister, failed to attend a meeting on March 29 with trade union representatives to discuss plans on the takeover of PGNiG's transmission system, worth €1.1 billion. The unions were particularly interested in the 12.7 percent stake to be distributed among 61,165 workers. Unions were told that the ministry asked a lawyer's office to prepare an opinion on the danger connected to giving the employees the shares. The stock was planned to be distributed before March 21.

#### **Africa**

##### **Ugandan tea workers strike over threatened sell-off**

More than 700 workers at the Ankole tea estate factory James Finlay in Uganda went on strike March 27. They were angered when they suddenly discovered that the factory was being sold to Mukwano Industries. Work at the factory came to a standstill on the following day when tea pluckers refused to go out into the estates to harvest the tea. Armed police were brought in to occupy the factory.

The workers complained that they had not received any information about the takeover deal. They demanded that if it went ahead they would expect to receive terminal benefits before signing up for the new owners, Mukwano. It later transpired that the sell-off had failed to go through.

##### **Tanker drivers strike in Nigeria**

Tanker drivers operating out of the Ibafor oil depot in Lagos went on strike April 4 as a result of a dispute with the Lagos state government and the Nigerian Navy. The drivers are complaining about the traffic and environmental situation at the Ibafor axis of the Apapa-Oshodi expressway—a situation that results in terrible traffic jams and a serious

loss of man-hours. The drivers are members of NUPENG (National Union of Petroleum and Gas Workers).

The Ibafor oil depot is the largest in the country. The strike is likely to worsen the fuel crisis that has led to long queues at petrol pumps in recent weeks.

#### **Striking South African security guards hold national march**

Striking South African security guards, belonging to the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (Satawu), held a national march on April 5 to protest against low wages and poor working conditions.

The union said its members would continue with their current strike action, since their representatives had not taken part in the wage deal for the security industry that was agreed with 14 other unions during the weekend of April 1-2. A Satawu spokesperson said the union had been "deliberately sidelined" in the negotiations, which were held under arbitration by the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). He said the deal to accept the 8 percent increase offered by the employers was made after the proceedings had been closed and the Satawu representatives had left the meeting.

Satawu, which represents around 40,000 security employees, says the offer is far below its demand for an 11 percent increase. It has threatened to launch an indefinite nationwide strike from April 9, unless the CCMA can bridge the gap between the two sides.

#### **South African farm workers protest unlawful evictions**

On April 1 the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) reported a march of hundreds of South African farm workers and their families through the streets of Stellenbosch in the Western Cape. They were chanting anti-eviction slogans in protest against the evictions of farm workers and their families from their homes on farms in Jonkershoek and other areas.

The Jonkershoek Crisis Committee in the Western Cape is demanding the government enforce the 2006 National Land Summit agreement by implementing a moratorium on farm dweller evictions. The SABC reported that 7 of the 13 farmers in Jonkershoek are carrying out evictions, involving families that have lived on the farms for generations.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions supports the campaign against the evictions and has declared that, if they continue, the farms will be occupied on April 27.



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