

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

29 June 2007

Europe

Spanair hit by contract and pay dispute

Airline staff employed by Spanair, Spain's second largest airline, staged a 24-hour strike June 25 in a dispute over working conditions, staffing levels and pay. The employees are members of the airline workers union Sitcpla.

The industrial action led to the airline cancelling 60 flights to and from its hub at Madrid Barajas airport to other cities in Spain and Europe. Spanair flies to a number of destinations in Europe including Gran Canaria, Lanzarote, Malaga, Frankfurt, Copenhagen, Zurich, Vienna and Ireland.

The airline signed a collective agreement with the Comisiones Obreras trade union last week, which includes most of its employees. Another airline trade union, Stavla, also called off a planned strike and agreed to sign the contract. At this stage Sitcpla has refused to sign the agreement. The union has authorised further strikes in July, August and September pending the resolution of the dispute.

Spanair employs more than 3,600 staff and is owned by the Scandinavian travel group SAS, who are planning to sell the airline.

Refuse workers in Salford, England strike

On June 27 refuse workers in Salford in northwest England began a 24-hour strike over pay and contracts. The 140 members of the Transport and General Workers' Union section of the Unite trade union include recycling teams and road sweepers employed by Salford City Council.

The union is calling for an end to a two-tier pay structure for agency and staff workers, an overtime ban and a work to rule. The agency workers are paid less and do not have the same contract rights as permanent staff.

Polish nurses continue strike following hunger

strike

This week several nurses in Poland called off a 24-hour hunger strike following a meeting with Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski. Four of the nurses began the hunger strike as several hundred nurses barricaded themselves in a room in his offices this week.

Nurses are demanding a pay increase of more than the 15 percent offered by the government and have been involved in industrial action for more than six weeks, affecting hundreds of hospitals nationwide. They are also calling for better working conditions and an increase in the amount of the GNP spent on healthcare from the current 3.7 percent to six percent.

On June 19, despite heavy rain, about 20,000 health care workers marched in Warsaw.

Following the end of the hunger strike, the nurses union said that it would continue negotiations with the government, but that strikes and protests would take place until a settlement was reached. Health care workers in Poland are poorly paid, receiving about half the average pay of staff in the European Union.

Service and hospitality workers in Belgium continue strike action

Staff employed in the hospitality and service industry continued strike action this week in several towns and cities in Belgium. On June 25 staff employed in company chains such as Quick, McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Lunch Garden and Colmar struck in the areas around Antwerp and Brussels.

The workers are striking to protest the refusal of two employers' federations to sign a new sector accord. The strike action has been called by the ABVV trade union. The union authorised the first strike action June 21.

National postal strike in Britain to go ahead

Britain's first national postal strike looked set to go ahead on Friday after talks between unions and Royal

Mail broke down. Some 130,000 postal workers are expected to take 24-hour industrial action after pay talks between the union and management at Royal Mail collapsed.

Postal workers had voted by more than a three-quarters majority to take strike action in opposition to a below inflation pay offer of just 2.5 percent and threats to cut 40,000 jobs.

Middle East

Postal employees strike across Israel

Workers at the Israel Postal Company went on strike June 20. Post office branches closed down June 21, and all services were suspended for an unspecified period.

Mail distribution ceased in most areas of the country. Affected post included income tax, VAT, vehicle ownership transfers, HMO memberships and diplomatic post. Initially National Insurance Institute payments were also to be left unprocessed, but following an appeal by Histadrut Chairman Ofer Eini, who said failure to hand out the entitlements would hurt the needy, the national union decided to distribute the NII contributions in all postal branches, starting June 22.

The postal union is not opposing privatisation of the service. According to *Ha'aretz*, the chairman of the postal service's national workers' committee, Reuven Karazi, said the workers are protesting against the government's refusal to delay opening the market to competition, which is scheduled for July 2. The union has asked that the company, currently a monopoly, be allowed flexibility in setting prices—such as reducing bulk mail rates—before competition is allowed. Otherwise, the Israel Postal Company will be uncompetitive, and this will result in either layoffs or bankruptcy, Karazi said.

Africa

Zambian council workers dismissed for going on strike

Striking council workers in the province of Ndola, Zambia, have been served with dismissal notices by their employers. Even before the recent notices, 72 of the strikers had already been dismissed.

The strike in Ndola is now in its second month. Both the union representing council workers, Zambia United Local Authorities Workers Union, and the umbrella organization, Zambia Congress of Trade Unions, are meeting with Local Government and Housing Minister,

Sylvia Masebo, to discuss how to end the dispute.

Nigerian public service workers attacked by thugs with machetes

At least 20 striking workers were injured in an attack by machete-wielding thugs on a peaceful demonstration in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, on June 27. Other workers, two of them women, were injured by moving vehicles during the attack. At least three had broken legs. Police were present at the scene, but did nothing to hinder the assault.

Prior to investigating the incident, the chief of the state police declared that the workers had attacked the thugs. The state government distanced itself from the attackers, but called it an “unfortunate incident”. The attack took place in broad daylight, within one kilometer of the state headquarters of the Nigeria Labor Congress (NLC), the organization to which the strikers' unions are affiliated.

The workers went on strike June 26 to demand that the incoming state government honor the agreement made by the outgoing administration and rescind a wage cut from N9,400 (US\$75) a month to N6,500 (US\$51.70).

In another conflict in Nigeria, resident doctors in Osun state are on indefinite strike as a result of state government inaction since the suspension of a previous walk-out. The doctors' complaints include the low number of doctors and other health staff on the state hospital's management board, the crisis in secondary healthcare and the low salaries of doctors and health service staff.



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