

Workers struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

22 January 2010

The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Irish air traffic controllers strike to defend suspended colleagues

Irish air traffic controllers struck for four hours on Wednesday, leading to the cancellation of more than 100 flights at the country's three main airports, Dublin, Shannon and Cork.

Aer Lingus was forced to cancel 64 flights affecting 7,000 passengers and Ryanair cancelled 48 flights, with more than 6,000 passengers affected.

The strike was called by the IMPACT trade union against the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA), following the suspension of 15 controllers who had refused to participate in "disputed new work practices."

Belgian beer plant workers continue blockade

The blockade by staff at Anheuser-Busch (AB) InBev's beer plants in Leuven and Liege continued this week, as trade unions and management failed to reach an agreement. Workers have been protesting plans by the company to shed 263 jobs and began the blockade just over two weeks ago.

AB InBev produces a number of beers including Stella Artois, whose supply to Belgian shops has begun to be affected by the blockade. The firm employs a total of 2,700 workers in Belgium and plans to axe 10 percent of its 8,000-strong European workforce.

Fiat trade unions in Italy vote to strike in dispute over plant closure

Several trade unions at Fiat in Italy have voted to hold nationwide industrial action on February 3 to protest plans by the company to close its Termini Imerese plant in Sicily, with the loss of 1,400 jobs.

Hundreds of workers at the Termini Imerese plant took strike action this week to oppose the closure. According to the AFP news agency a union official said that Fiat's 85,000 workers had been authorised to participate in the four hour stoppage next month.

Workers at Total refineries in France end two day strike

On January 14 staff at two of Total's French refineries (Gonfreville and Donges) voted to end a two-day strike. The workers had been protesting possible closure of the Dunkirk refinery in northern France.

The stoppage was called by the CGT trade union, which said that it had called another strike, set to take place in February. On the same day Total is to hold a meeting with representatives of the workers regarding its plans for the Dunkirk refinery.

Spain: SEAT employees end two-day stoppage in Barcelona over job losses

Workers employed by of Volkswagen's Spanish subsidiary SEAT ended their strike action in Barcelona on Wednesday, after reaching an agreement with management. The strike at the sheet metal plant was called to oppose management's decision to shed more than 300 white-collar jobs. According to sources management has agreed to "re-evaluate" the decision.

The action was set to affect production at the nearby SEAT factory in Martorell and several other Volkswagen factories. SEAT employs some 13,000 workers throughout Spain.

In the last year sales of SEAT cars have declined by 8.6 per cent to around 337,000 cars.

UK: Strike at food processing plant in Cambridgeshire

On January 13, workers at Premier Foods' canning factory in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, England struck for 24-hours in a pay dispute. Workers were not offered a pay increase for April after managers were awarded a pay increase in July.

The action began following a breakdown in talks between the Unite trade union and management. It is the first official strike at the plant in more than 30 years.

Hungarian railway workers strike in support of public transport staff

On January 14 railway workers in Hungary held a four hour strike in support of public transport workers in Budapest, who were involved in a third day of industrial action. The strike meant the railway station in the northeastern industrial centre of Miskolc was unable to operate as normal and caused delays in the southeastern city of Szeged, where a number of railway conductors walked off the job.

Egypt: Mahalla spinning workers suspend hunger strike

Workers employed at the Mahalla Spinning and Weaving Company in the Nile Delta, Egypt have suspended a hunger strike, which had been scheduled to commence on Tuesday. The hunger strike had been agreed by the workers to protest actions allegedly taken against them by the company's commissioner-general, Fouad Hassan.

The hunger strike was declared after Hassan sacked a workers' representative, Mustafa Foda, and financially penalized another, Faisal Laqousha, last December. The workers are demanding that the two be reinstated and that the firm increase payments for transportation and housing costs. The Manpower Ministry is to investigate the alleged actions of Hassan.

Workers threaten to strike Bahrain firm over dismissal over trade union representative

Some 90 workers employed by Bramco in Bahrain have threatened to strike to demand the reinstatement of a sacked trade union representative. According to the *Trade Arabia* web site, the workers claim that the union leader, Adel Isa, was unfairly dismissed on January 7.

Bramco is a large firm involved in mining, earth moving and marble supply, and employs more than 1,000 staff.

Isa said, "I have been targeted because I did not allow the management to browbeat the employees. I have always fought for the rights of the workers and have made sure they are not victimised. The management did not like this and terminated my services."

Management has said that Isa was sacked after receiving three warning letters.

Isa said that he had not called the industrial action, but that the workers "came to me on their own and said they would not work in protest. I cannot stop them."

The company said that the strike would also be considered illegal.

South Africa gold miners' strike

Over 200 mineworkers at the Kals Harmony mine in the Northwest province went out on strike January 15. The miners, who work for ALS Mining, a mining services firm, are members of the National Union of Mineworkers. They were seeking a 15 percent wage increase back dated to May last year, whilst the company offer was for a 10 percent increase back dated to December. Following discussions between the NUM and ALS an agreement was reached and the miners returned to work Wednesday 20 January.

South African platinum miners' sit-in protest

Around 60 miners at the Two Rivers platinum mine, Lydenburg, began a sit-in protest at the mine's main shaft on Tuesday 19 January. The workers are members of a small union, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU). The sit-in was in support of a demand for back pay.

The action was unofficial and the regional AMCU secretary has called on the miners to end their sit-in.

South African soft drinks workers strike continues

Nearly 3,000 workers of Amalgamated Beverages Industries, soft drink manufacturers, began strike action on December 22. They are seeking a 9.5 percent wage increase, a 45-hour working week and payment for overtime. The workers are members of the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU).

An agreement on an eight percent pay increase negotiated last week between ABI management and the union was rejected by the membership. The union was due to hold mass rallies this week at the various sites being picketed by the workers. The rallies are to be addressed by the FAWU General Secretary Katishi Masemola.

According to the union, they are due to meet with the COSATU trade union federation over the next two weeks, prior to a Coca Cola Workers Alliance meeting in Geneva at the beginning of February. The meeting with COSATU is to discuss a boycott campaign of Coca Cola products and alcoholic beverages produced by the ABI parent company SAB in the run up to the 2010 FIFA Soccer tournament.

Kenya: Health workers strike

Health workers at the Ngao district hospital in the Tana Delta took strike action last weekend. The workers accused the hospital superintendent of high-handedness and said there was lack of leadership in the hospital. They were also protesting over the shortage of medical supplies, including drugs and rubber gloves.

Nigeria: Striking teachers threatened with sanctions

Striking teachers belonging to the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) working in primary schools in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) were threatened with heavy sanctions if they did not return to work.

The threats were made by the FCT Education Secretariat. The strike is over payment of arrears of pay and housing benefit owed to the teachers. The FCT Education Secretariat recently met with the union and thought it had agreed on a return to work. However, the teachers are continuing their action.



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