

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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

Air traffic controllers strike in France

Air traffic controllers began a five-day strike February 23 in defence of their jobs.

Four French unions called the strike to protest against the planned merger of the Belgian, Dutch, French, German, Luxembourg and Swiss air traffic control networks. According to the *Irish Times*, "Unions fear the pan-European deal will result in the loss of jobs, and timed their five-day strike to coincide with France's midterm school holiday."

The deal to modernise air traffic control was recently signed by France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland. Under the plans, the six nations intend to increasingly integrate their air traffic control services.

Flights were cancelled at the two main Paris airports. Half of the flights in and out of Orly airport have been cancelled, while one in four from Charles de Gaulle has also been pulled from the schedules.

Disruptions are expected to continue until February 27.

The latest strike appears during a spate of labour disputes across the continent this week. Twelve thousand British Airways cabin crew workers voted overwhelmingly for strike action in a dispute over jobs and conditions, while in Germany, pilots at Lufthansa began a four-day walkout last week, only to see it suspended by their union.

EasyJet staff in Berlin strike

Around 300 cabin staff and crew, employed by budget airline easyJet, took limited strike action at Berlin's Schönefeld Airport February 18, in protest at the British airline's refusal to allow the workers to form a works council.

The Verdi union staged a first warning strike on December 3.

Protests in Spain over spending cuts and raising of retirement age

Thousands of workers protested in Spain's major cities against government spending cuts and plans to raise the retirement age from

65 to 67 years.

The main demonstration was in Madrid, where union officials estimated 60,000 participated.

Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's socialist government announced 50 billion euro spending cuts and a civil service hiring freeze in January.

Like its southern European neighbours, Spain faces a huge budget deficit and high unemployment.

According to a recent BBC article, "Spain's rising debt has prompted scrutiny from bond markets worried about a Greek-style budget crisis."

Limited strike action continues at London's National Gallery

Industrial action by gallery attendants at the National Gallery continued this week, forcing the closure of all but five of the gallery's 66 rooms for several hours a day.

According to Zbisiu Ovzechowski, the union's National Gallery branch secretary, gallery attendants are paid as little as £6.45 per hour.

The strike followed the gallery imposition of a rejected pay offer. Gallery attendants were offered rises of between 2.52 and 3.79 percent.

Second worker joins hunger strike at Green Isle Foods, Ireland

A second worker at the Green Isle Foods plant in Naas, County Kildare, has gone on hunger strike.

John Guinan has joined shop steward Jim Wyse, who has been on hunger strike outside the plant for one week over the sacking of three members of staff. Approximately 13 maintenance workers have been on strike for six months in protest at the dismissals, which reportedly occurred when "a confidential file with restructuring proposals was mistakenly sent to an employee who shared the information with co-workers".

Neither of the men is amongst those originally dismissed but unions accuse the firm of failing to abide with Labour Court recommendations to settle the dispute.

Green Isle is a subsidiary of Northern Foods Leeds, UK, who reportedly received generous state aid to set up its Irish factory. A demonstration in support of the workers will be held this Saturday.

Work-to-rule by secondary teachers in Ireland

According to the *Irish Times*, February 24, “Problems with state examination coordination, disciplinary and pastoral care and even school closures are among the possible effects of an escalation of action by second-level teacher unions.”

The paper reports that the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI) and the Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) has asked teachers not to cover unfilled management posts of teachers who resign or take maternity leave.

This comes ahead of an expected surge in retirements by post-holding teachers in September in order to retain their 2009 pension levels.

About 900 teachers, many of whom held posts, retired in the last year, with about 1,000 expected to retire by September, according to the ASTI.

School management bodies have expressed concern as to how schools will operate in September.

Clive Byrne, director of the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, said many schools were under “unsustainable pressure”.

Primary schools may also be affected, with the executive council of the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation expected to decide on similar action next month.

National transport strike in Finland

A threatened strike by bus and lorry drivers has been postponed by over a week. National Conciliator, Esa Lonka, asked the Ministry of Employment and the Economy to order a postponement of the strike, which was originally to have started on February 21, according to the *Helsingin Sanomat*.

Under the new schedule, the strike would begin on March 2, if no settlement is reached before that. It is set to affect the largest long-distance bus companies, as well as about half of the bus services of the Helsinki region.

On February 19, the Transport Workers’ Union (AKT) issued a logistics sector strike notice, the union’s third over the past couple of weeks. Logistics centre workers are to go on strike March 5, joining bus and lorry drivers and stevedores nationwide.

AKT said that most of the country’s 1,000 or so warehouse workers would go on strike. The closure of the ports will bring about 80 percent of Finland’s foreign trade to a halt.

Nigerian aluminium workers, research staff and judiciary employees strike

Workers at the ACRUSAL Aluminium smelting works, in Ikot Abasi, Akwa state, stopped work Monday, February 22, for five hours in their fight for improved working conditions. Workers say they have been pushing management since 2008 to bring in modern machines

because the current ones are outdated and difficult to operate.

Their other demands included ending temporary contracts for some workers and restoration of tinned milk supplies that are supposed to help alleviate health hazards associated with the work.

On the same day a nationwide strike of research workers, organised across five unions, began. They are demanding the establishment of a committee to negotiate their conditions with the government and want parity with the wages and conditions of research staff in tertiary education facilities and the health service.

Meanwhile, judiciary workers belonging to the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) and employed in the South East zone of Nigerian states are continuing their strike action. They want the states to implement the Consolidated Judiciary Salary Structure CONJUSS agreed with the federal government in 1999.

Public sector workers strike continues in Zimbabwe

Public servants are continuing their strike action in Zimbabwe, in pursuit of a pay rise. The strike is now in its third week. Some workers are discussing workplace occupations.

National Union of Mineworker members in South Africa in dispute

Workers at the South African state-owned power company, Eskom are threatening strike action. The workers are organised by the National Union of Mineworkers. They have organised marches over the last week in support of their demands, which include housing allowances and making temporary workers permanent.

In a separate dispute, 300 workers organised by the NUM are in the second week of an all-out strike. They work at a sodium carbonates and industrial materials business jointly owned by equity companies and the Black Economic Empowerment company the Tiso group. The workers chose the NUM to represent them but the union is not recognised by the company.



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