

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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## French unions end Airbus strikes

Workers at Airbus, the world's largest commercial aircraft manufacturer, have called off a strike that was slowing production of the A320 and A330 aircraft. Since April 26 workers in Toulouse had been blocking fuselage deliveries, while workers at other French airbus plants had been rotating strikes on assembly lines in opposition to company proposals to move production to Germany. Workers were also protesting a 1.9 percent pay offer, backing the 3.5 percent demanded by unions.

The strikes were called off after Airbus management offered to meet union officials. Airbus employs 20,000 workers in France, 10,000 in Germany and 52,000 worldwide. Reflecting the nationalism of the unions, no effort was made to mobilise German Airbus workers.

## London college lecturers oppose funding and staff cuts

Teaching staff at colleges and universities across London struck May 5 against sweeping funding cuts. Colleges involved include Barnet, Islington, Haringey, Lambeth, Lewisham, Richmond, Tower Hamlets and Westminster Kingsway. Kings College and the University of Westminster are also involved.

At Lambeth, £9 million has been cut from the college's teaching budget since 2006 and a further £3.5 million is expected to be lost this year. College management are to dispense with 26 full-time teachers and support staff. The lecturers' union, the University College Union (UCU), says that 47 positions are under threat.

Strikes and lunchtime protests were also held in the North East, Sussex and Birmingham.

The UCU called off a strike planned for University College London on the basis that it had offered "suitable alternative

employment" to staff displaced by the university's efforts to cut costs. The UCU issued a joint statement with UCL management, announcing the establishment of a "joint consultative group to review workforce planning".

## Food workers strike in Finland

The food workers union in Finland has rejected a conciliation proposal in their dispute with the Finnish Food and Drink Industries' Federation (ETL). The ETL promptly locked out 18,000 workers for 28 hours. In response food workers supported a strike call, closing 80 large food production units across the country.

The dispute is over employer proposals to introduce flexible working practices, including extended hours at peak periods. A further six-day strike is planned for May 11.

Food workers walked out before the official strike was due to start. Workers in the Vassan Oy bakery in Kuopio struck in opposition to company efforts to ignore overtime restrictions.

## Theatre workers on strike in Italy

Theatre workers have called strikes across Italy in opposition to an emergency government decree on funding to 14 state-supported opera houses intended to slash benefits and break up bargaining arrangements. Performances of "Don Quixote" and "Das Rheingold" have been affected.

Some 5,500 workers will be targeted by the changes, which limit compensation and put a moratorium on new hires.

## Oil workers in Portugal plan to close refineries

Workers at Portugal's GALP oil company intend to strike at the company's two refineries between May 18 and May 21. The union is demanding a 2.8 percent pay increase, while

GALP is offering 1.5 percent.

### **Teachers in Zimbabwe continue wage struggle**

As the new school term began this week, teachers are still pushing for a salary of around US\$600 a month. The government recently awarded teachers and other civil servants a 10 percent increase. Currently teachers earn around US\$160 a month.

The government has been making conflicting statements. Two weeks ago, Finance Minister Tendai Biti announced a pay freeze for all civil servants while Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, addressing a May Day rally, said the government was still deliberating on the issue.

The Zimbabwe Teachers' Association (ZIMTA) has called on its members to report for duty, but its president, Mrs. Tendai Chikowore, said, "Whether teachers would take up their classes or not ... is something else, we are just encouraging them to report for duty."

The Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe and the Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe have called for class boycotts. Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe President Lovemore Mufamb explained, "The freezing of salaries has created havoc and disharmony in the teaching profession."

Progressive Teachers Union President Takavafira Zhou called on all civil servants to reject the pay freeze.

### **Burundi teachers in prolonged strike action**

Teachers belonging to the Syndicat des travailleurs de l'enseignement du Burundi (STEB) began strike action back in March over non-payment of two years worth of wages amounting to US\$43 million. They have been joined in their action by teachers belonging to the National Council for Personnel in Secondary Education and the Free Trade Union for Burundi Teachers.

The government has reneged on an agreement it had signed in July 2002, along with the teachers unions. President Pierre Nkurunziza has called on the teachers to return to work. The government has suspended the right to strike, using the powers of a decree from 2005 that imposed a ban on strikes in the lead-up to a general election. There are a series of elections over the next two months, leading to the presidential election on June 28.

### **South Africa transport workers set to strike**

Workers employed by Transnet, which runs freight trains along with its rail engineering facilities and port terminals, are set to strike May 10. The 50,000 workers are members of the South African and Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) and the United Transport and Allied Trade Union (UTATU).

The unions have been in discussion with the employers since March. They are seeking a 15 percent wage increase, but the company is offering 8 percent. Other issues in dispute include a guarantee of no retrenchments next year and making contract workers permanent.

Around 50,000 workers of the same two unions working for the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) are also in dispute over wages. If discussions between the company and the unions do not reach agreement, the workers could take strike action from May 11. Strike action could affect nearly 60 percent of daily commuter journeys.

### **National strike over minimum wage proposed in Tanzania**

Trade union leaders used May Day celebrations to call for a national strike in pursuit of a minimum wage. Trade Union Congress of Tanzania (TUCTA) President Omary Ayoub Juma called on workers to take strike action from May 5 if talks with the government failed.

TUCTA is calling for a minimum wage of US\$111 per month, as determined by the minimum wage board in 2007. The government has put forward a figure of US\$88.80, while the Confederation of Tanzanian Industries and the Association of Tanzania Employment are pushing for a figure of around US\$59.



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