

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

23 July 2010

## France: Air traffic controllers' strike causes major disruption

Air traffic controllers took strike action July 21 to protest plans to merge the country's 4,000 controllers and 8,000 other DGAC personnel into a European-wide system. Condensing the 27 separate air traffic systems in the European Union into nine hubs will result in huge job cuts.

The strike caused serious disruption to domestic and European flights. One in five flights from Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris were cancelled, while half of flights from Orly are grounded.

The industrial action is the third major airport strike in France this year.

Budget airline Ryanair made a provocative call to the government to deploy the army to break the strike. The company said the government should "intervene in future strikes... if necessary by calling out the French military to operate air traffic control."

## Greece: Public sector workers in anti-austerity strike action

On July 15, hundreds of workers employed in the public sector demonstrated outside the parliament building in Athens as a vote was being prepared on pension changes for public servants that include raising the age of retirement.

Air traffic controllers also walked out for the second Thursday morning in succession, as part of the strike.

The four-hour strike (original plans for a 24-hour strike were abandoned) caused disruption to flights in and out of the country.

Doctors also joined the strike, forcing state hospitals to run with only a skeleton staff. The strike also shut down government offices across the country.

Greek officials agreed to reform the pension system as one of the conditions for receiving a €110bn (\$139bn) economic bailout from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund.

## Italy: Strikes at Fiat plants over bonus cuts and victimisations

A series of strikes took place over the past week at Fiat plants throughout the country, over the companies' decision to cut bonuses this year.

On July 16, Fiom and other unions called for a four-hour strike throughout Italy. The strike was in protest at the sacking of four trade unionists in retaliation for not signing the Pomigliano deal.

*Pracownik* reported that workers in Tychy, Poland were angered when they learnt that a worker at the Mirafiori factory in Turin, Pino Capozzi,

was fired for sending out the letter they had written using email at work.

## Italy: Doctors in 24-hour strike

The country's public-sector doctors carried out a one-day strike on July 19, in protest at government austerity measures that will freeze hiring at hospitals and not renew many temporary contracts.

The medical workers also protested outside the parliament building in Rome.

The strike action led to the postponing of 40,000 surgical operations. Administrative employees and public-sector veterinarians also joined the strike, which did not affect emergency services.

Massimo Cozza, head of the doctors' union affiliated with the CGIL federation said, "We apologise to the citizens for the disturbances, (but) the precious good of public health is at stake."

The Italian Senate last week approved a two-year austerity plan for cuts totalling €24.9 billion aimed at reassuring financial markets. The lower house Chamber of Deputies must vote on the plan, which will slash budgets by 10 percent by the end of the month.

Unions say the hiring freeze will lead to a shortfall of an estimated 30,000 doctors and health workers over the next four years.

The health-sector branches of most of the country's smaller unions backed the strike, but the two other main unions, the Catholic CISL and the social democratic UIL, did not.

## UK: Rail drivers take solidarity strike action

On July 20, 77 tube train drivers, members of the ASLEF union, took 24 hours of strike action at Rickmansworth after one of their colleagues was unfairly dismissed.

The incident that led to the dismissal occurred when a woman passenger was trapped in a door, injured her leg and was left on the platform. Work colleagues believe that the driver, who has "33 years unblemished service" and is being held responsible, is not at fault. The incident is said to have been caused by safety deficiencies, especially concerning mirrors, which had been reported regularly to management.

Acting general secretary for the union, Simon Weller, said, "It is utterly wrong that one of our members should be disciplined because management failed to react to our warnings. Our members are perfectly entitled to react against this flawed judgement—which is why 90 percent voted in favour of the action."

## **UK: BBC staff threaten industrial action over pensions**

Thousands of BBC staff, including journalists, technicians and musicians, have threatened coordinated strikes if a dispute over pensions is not settled this week.

The unions have called on the corporation to withdraw its plans to force through “punitive” changes to the staff pension scheme.

The strike threat follows the BBC’s announcement of plans to cap pensionable pay at one percent from April 2011 and revalue pensions at a lower level.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ), Bectu, Unite, Equity and the Musicians Union called on the BBC to make changes to the proposed pension cuts. A BBC spokesman said that the corporation’s proposals are subject to a three-month consultation period and the “unions’ concerns would be addressed” during that period.

## **UK: Tube workers set for strike ballot over looming job losses**

Thousands of London Underground workers are to begin voting on strike action in a dispute over 800 jobs jobs, which the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union says are under threat, and 140 ticket offices lined up for closure, with further cuts being planned.

The ballot will close August 11.

## **UK: Nestle workers balloted on action in pay dispute**

“The first national ballot for industrial action at food giant Nestle is to be held in a dispute over pay,” reported the BBC July 18.

The Unite union is to ballot thousands of Nestle workers over what it called a policy of “pay restraint.”

Workers at company sites including York, Castleford, Halifax and Glasgow are to vote in the coming weeks. The company also has plants at Dalston in Cumbria, Wisbech in Cambridgeshire, Sudbury in Suffolk and Aintree, Merseyside.

Unite accused Nestle of refusing to enter into national negotiations, claiming the company wanted to move towards performance-related pay.

Nestle apparently offered a mere one percent pay increase with a 1.5 percent bonus.

## **UK: Lobby of Westminster over school building cuts**

On July 19, hundreds of teachers demonstrated at the Westminster Houses of Parliament in protest at the coalition government’s plans to severely cut school infrastructure funding.

Anger at education secretary Michael Gove’s announcement two weeks ago that he intended to scrap the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme was intensified by inaccuracies in the initial list of schools facing disappointment.

Local Authorities have spent over £200 million preparing for school rebuilding schemes that have now been cancelled.

## **Iceland: Fire and ambulance crews may take strike action**

Around 200 fire fighters and ambulance drivers are set to go on strike after the failure of pay negotiations.

The contract talks between the National Association of Fire Fighters and Ambulance Drivers and the Local Governments’ Pay Committee have been ongoing for almost a year without agreement.

Negotiation has twice been sent to state mediators, but was formally ended July 15 after no agreement was reached.

*Ice News* said, “Valdimar Leo Fridriksson, head of the National Association of Fire Fighters and Ambulance Drivers told RUV that the negotiations were brought to an end due to the local governments’ apparent lack of enthusiasm to reach a deal. He says the last offer from the employers amounted to a one percent pay increase.”

A strike is now expected to begin July 23.

Fridriksson said that 95 percent of union members had voted in favour of the strike and that member participation in the vote had been high.

## **Kenyan agricultural workers strike over pay and conditions**

More than 300 workers at a farm in the South Lake area in Naivasha, northwest of Nairobi, went on strike over pay and conditions. Riot police were called after workers staged a protest demonstration outside the main gate of the farm.

They work for Vegetable Production Kenya Limited (VEPRO). The workers accuse the company of renegeing on a deal struck between management and the Central Organization Kenya Plantation Workers’ Union (KPWU) in June. Under the deal the workers should have received an 11 percent pay increase backdated to August last year.

The workers also raised concern over the lack of protective clothing when using possibly harmful chemicals.

This is the third farm to face such action over the last few weeks. More than 1,500 workers employed at the Aquilla and Karuturi farms were involved in strike action over poor pay, working conditions and harassment by management. The area has many flower production facilities employing over 50,000 workers, the flowers being for export mainly to Europe.

## **Rwandan construction workers down tools over non-payment of wages**

Around 200 workers on the construction of the new Ministry of Justice and Supreme Court have begun sit-down strike action over non-payment of wages. The new building in the exclusive Kacyiru area of Kigali is being funded by a two million euro donation from the European Union.

The workers are taking action against AMCECO, the Belgian based company. One of the workers, Eric Kabayiza, told the press, “We have been coming here almost every day on invitation to get our wages, only to be given another rendezvous. This is outrageous.”

The director of works at the site blamed the hold-up on a problem with the banks, but workers think the firm may have a cash flow problem.

## **South African public sector workers gearing up for action**

Fourteen different unions which represent over a million public sector workers (including teachers and nurses) are pushing for a pay increase of 8.6 percent and for the monthly housing allowance to be increased to R1000 (US\$133) The government is offering 6.5 percent and a housing allowance of R620 (US\$82).

Around 200,000 civil servants, members of the Public Servants Association, have already balloted its members, who voted for strike action. The strike is set to begin 29 July.

Around 28,000 teachers belonging to the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) are also contemplating strike action, over the same government offer. The union is currently consulting its members and will hold regional and provincial executive meetings, after which the national executive will meet to decide on action. The union's Chief Executive, Chris Klopper, said around two-thirds of teachers consulted in an indicative ballot were in favour of industrial action.

Action could take place in the run up to the all-important matriculation exams due in October.



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**