

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

13 August 2010

## Spanish air traffic controllers union calls off industrial action

This week the Spanish air traffic controllers, USCA, called off strike action expected to take place later this month. Controllers employed by the state-run Aeropuertos Españoles y Navegación Aérea (AENA) had voted 98 percent in favour of three-day industrial action.

The union cancelled the action on the basis that any strike would have a severe impact on the Spanish tourist industry. USCA spokesman Cesar Cabo said the strike was cancelled as “an exercise in responsibility”.

In February the government imposed by decree a 40-percent wage cut on the controllers. According to reports it is now imposing an increase in yearly hours’ from 1,000 to 1,600 and, despite rising levels of illness, a reduction in rest periods.

According to a report in the *Daily Mail*, “The union is still in talks with ANEA, the Spanish airports authority, which had made cancelling the strike a condition for continuing negotiations”.

## Seasonal berry pickers in Sweden continue protests

Berry pickers in northern Sweden have held a number of protests over the last week to demand more pay and better working conditions. On Wednesday some 50 Vietnamese berry pickers walked off the job in Baggård south of Umeå in northern Sweden. The workers said they had been led to believe they would be picking berries in plantations and not in woodland.

According to *The Local* more than 100 Chinese berry pickers marched 15 kilometres from Långsjöby outside of Storuman the previous week to demand better pay and conditions.

In previous years many seasonal workers have accumulated debts from picking berries, such has been the low pay and the costs they face. According a report on the Swedish Wire website, this year is the first time the workers have “been provided with contracts guaranteeing them a monthly wage of at least 16,372 kronor (\$2,321)”.

The report added, “Some Swedish unions have, however, said that the minimum salary is insufficient, producing evidence that in some cases it is hardly enough to cover the money the workers have to shell out for things like plane tickets, housing and car rental”.

## Strike at Piaggio Aero Industries plants in Italy ends

A strike by more than 1,600 employees at two Piaggio Aero Industries plants in Italy that began on July 26, ended on August 6. According to a report by Avio News, “[T]he company has partly accepted the demands of workers”. The report said that the agreement included increasing bonus payments to 409 euros.

The strike involved workers from the CGIL, CISL and UIL trade unions at the Finale Ligure and Genoa plants.

Raimondo Cirino, a representative of the FIM-CISL trade union said, “[M]uch remains to be defined” regarding the agreement. Previously Cirino has said the action was “an indefinite strike” that would continue “to the bitter end”.

## Auto supply plant workers in Coventry, England, vote to reject company transfer offer

Last week, staff at the Browns Lane Veneer Manufacturing Centre in Coventry, England, voted to reject a £1,000 transfer bonus to move from Coventry to Birmingham. More than 350 employees voted in the ballot with 66 percent voting in favour of industrial action. The workers are members of the Unite trade union.

The company produces wood veneer parts for both the local Jaguar and Land Rover car plants.

Unite is not opposed to workers being transferred to another plant. Des Quinn, Unite’s regional organiser said, “The company has offered £1,000 for transition bonuses and people have come back and said they want more”.

The union has not set a date for any possible industrial action citing the impact it would have. Quinn said if industrial action went ahead, “There would be concerns about production at Jaguar and Land Rover if there is no resolution of the situation, and we are working hard to achieve a resolution”.

## England: Southampton City Council library staff to continue strike

Council workers employed in libraries in Southampton, England, voted last week to hold two further strikes in opposition to cuts. Conservative Party-led Southampton City Council plans to end the employment of seven full-time staff and replace them with volunteers. Other plans include one branch library being run by volunteers and the closure of another.

The strikes are set to be held on Friday and Monday with pickets to be set up at Central, Shirley, Portswood, Woolston and Bitterne libraries.

Library workers held a 24-hour strike in June. A further strike was planned for July but was called off by the Unison trade union after discussion with management.

## Irish cabin crew vote to strike, trade union refuses to call action

Cabin crew staff at Irish airline Aer Lingus have voted by a large

majority to take strike action in opposition to further cost reduction measures. Aer Lingus is implementing the restructuring, including new rosters, longer working hours and cuts in pay as part of its “Greenfield” strategy.

The workers voted 96 percent in favour on a turnout of 67 percent.

Upon the announcement of the ballot result, the cabin crew trade union IMPACT, announced that it did not intend to call a strike or cause any disruption. Previously the union had described having to hold a strike ballot as “deeply regrettable”.

In March the union had agreed to rosters being implemented that increased working time to an annual 850 hours and cuts in pay.

Speaking on RTE Radio, IMPACT Assistant General Secretary Christina Kearney said any action would have no impact on flight schedules in and out of Ireland. Asked if there would be any disruption to Aer Lingus she said “absolutely not”. Kearney said that as a result of the IMPACT/management March agreement, “Like all other staff in Aer Lingus, Cabin crew are doing their bit. They’re taking the pain. They’re working harder and for less money, which we agreed to and there is absolutely no issue with it”.

Kearney said the company was now attempting to implement further cost cutting “unilaterally” without consulting the union.

Under Irish law notice of industrial action would take effect from August 25.

### **Metro workers strike in Athens, Greece, ruled illegal**

Strike action by Metro system employees in Athens, Greece, was ruled illegal on Wednesday by a court order. The transport staff were scheduled to strike for five hours between 5 and 10 a.m. the same day. The staff are protesting the non-renewal of the contracts of 286 of their co-workers by AMEL, the company that runs the Metro.

*Kathemerini* reported, “However, a court decided shortly after midnight that the action was illegal”. The newspaper added that some workers continued to strike as “their union, SELMA, had not informed them the work stoppage had been called off. As a result, even though the work stoppage did not take place, the metro system did not function properly until about 8 a.m.”.

The ruling against the Metro staff comes just days after the military were used by the Greek government to break the nationwide truckers strike.

### **Construction workers in Almaty, Kazakhstan, to begin hunger strike over unpaid wages**

Construction workers employed building a subway in Almaty, Kazakhstan’s largest city, were due to begin a hunger strike Wednesday to demand wages that have been unpaid for three months.

The workers have previously struck for three days. The Uranus CNI construction company, which employs the workers, said it had not paid them as, “Our partner company, AlmatyMetroQurylys, refused to pay us, and therefore we are not able to pay the wages”.

AlmatyMetroQurylys has disputed this claim, according to reports.

### **Kenyan non-academic staff threaten strike action**

Over 14,000 non-academic staff belonging to the National Universities Non Teaching Staff have threatened strike action over pay arrears. They are set to strike August 16 if the outstanding money is not paid.

The union had held talks with the government and received a promise from them that the arrears would be paid by July. However the government reneged on its promise.

### **Nigerian Delta state hospital staff take three days of strike action**

Doctors, nursing and other hospital staff in Delta state hospitals held a three-day strike at the end of last week in support of their demand that the state government implements the new agreed salary structure.

The new structure was agreed last year by the Federal government and should have been paid since June and back-dated to January. The staff pledged further action in support of their demand.

### **Nigerian Shoprite workers sacked for taking industrial action**

Around 250 workers working for the Shoprite supermarket chain have been sacked following 11 days of industrial action. They are protesting Shoprite management’s failure to pay an agreed bonus for the period of February to April this year.

The workers union, the National Union of Shop Distributive Employees, threatened to escalate the action following the sackings.

### **Nigerian Petroleum Training Institute workers resume strike**

Staff working at the Petroleum Training Institute in Delta state, belonging to the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria and the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers unions stopped work Tuesday.

The workers had struck previously to demand safer working conditions and for the removal of the institute’s head Dr Raymond Akpljivi.

### **South African public sector unions seek deal with government**

Following a strike on Tuesday involving more than one million public sector workers and demonstrations in many cities, union leaders are desperate to seal a deal with the government.

The unions are calling for an 8.6 percent pay increase and R1000 monthly housing allowance. The government offer is 7 percent and R630 monthly housing allowance.

The unions have said unless an agreement is reached this week, they will be forced to take prolonged action. One union leader explained, “We are optimistic that the government will come back to us with a significant offer. Our members want to avoid protracted strike action”.

## South African car workers begin strike action

More than 30,000 car workers belonging to the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa began strike action Wednesday, in pursuit of a 15 percent pay increase. The workers have rejected the employers 7 percent offer. Amongst the companies affected are Daimler, Ford, Volkswagen, General Motors and BMW.

A BMW spokesman said he hoped the strike could soon be resolved through the auspices of the car manufacturing trade body, the Automobile Manufacturers Employers Association.



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