

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

17 February 2012

## Iberia pilots continue strike over setting up of low-cost carrier

Spain's main airline, Iberia, was forced to cancel 121 flights Monday, February 13, as a pilots' strike continued against the national carriers' plans to launch a low-cost Iberia Express airline. Due to start in the spring, it will take over short- and medium-haul routes, which pilots insist will adversely affect their working conditions.

Cabin crew and ground staff also participated in the action, which is part of a long-running dispute that has seen pilots strike for two days in December and a further three days last month.

Further strikes are planned for today and February 20, 24 and 29.

## Hundreds of Swedish cabin crew strike over working hours

After failure to reach an agreement with three airlines over working hours, around 400 Swedish cabin crew members went on strike Tuesday, February 14.

The union, Unionen, says employers want to schedule working time for cabin crew of up to 60 hours a week. Cabin crew want a 42-hour maximum.

The cabin crew are employed by the airlines TUIfly Nordic, Novair and Primera Air, which fly for package holiday organisers such as Apollo, Fritidsresor and Solresor.

## Four-day strike at Air France ends without resolution

On February 9, a four-day strike by workers at Air France over government anti-strike legislation ended with a warning that more action may follow.

The industrial action was in response to a government bill that would oblige every worker in the air transport sector to make a personal declaration of participation in a strike 48 hours before it was due to start.

The bill was devised to allow airlines to plan a minimum service and so undermine any industrial action.

Air France claimed it had maintained 75 percent of its flights during the dispute, but had been forced to make 300 last-minute cancellations and lost €100 million in revenue from the strike.

But the pilots' union, the SNPL, which has majority representation at Air France, claimed the national carrier had actually cancelled or

chartered 42 percent of long-haul flights and 50 percent of mid-haul flights during the strike.

Another four-day stoppage later this month has been proposed if the government bill is not withdrawn.

## Frankfurt Airport ground staff could strike over pay offer

*Reuters* reported February 10 that ground staff in charge of parking positions at Frankfurt airport—Germany's largest hub—have threatened imminent industrial action over a pay offer.

A union source was cited by *Reuters* that Fraport, the airport's operator, rejected a mediator's proposal for 200 so-called apron control staff.

The opening of a fourth runway at the Frankfurt airport has significantly affected the responsibilities of the workers in dispute.

## March strike planned for Italian metal workers

Metal workers could go on an eight-hour national strike on March 9 “against the government’s plans to relax rules that give workers sweeping job security,” according to a February 14 *Reuters* report.

The proposed industrial action would also protest auto giant Fiat's introduction of more flexible working practices for its 86,000 Italian workers in a contract passed in December.

The government is currently in talks with the three main unions to “reform the country’s rigid labour market, in hopes of boosting economic growth,” said *Reuters*.

Fiat's European car sales are expected to fall 17.6 percent in January compared to last year when figures are announced on Thursday, Global Insight said on Tuesday.

## Thousands of Cypriot construction workers in 24-hour strike

On February 14, a 24-hour strike by thousands of construction workers across the island brought the industry to a standstill as they protested the employers' decision to freeze pay rises and the Cost of Living Allowance (CoLA).

Employers ignored a previous decision by the Labour Ministry, for CoLA to be left untouched, and cut it unilaterally.

One point of contention amongst workers is that permanent staff are being fired and being replaced with subcontractors and EU workers to

save money.

### **Belgian port workers' strike over raising of retirement age**

Industrial action by port workers over government plans to raise their retirement age brought ports to a virtual halt on Tuesday, February 14, reports *Reuters*.

The strike also shut down Antwerp, Europe's second busiest port in terms of cargo tonnage.

### **Teachers in Estonia to strike over wages**

After talks with the government over wages broke down, Estonian teachers and day care workers will strike for three days starting March 7.

The Education Personnel Union said it wants a 20 percent increase in teachers' wages in 2012 and 15 percent in both 2013 and 2014, according to its web site.

Railway workers, energy workers, miners, seamen and transport workers are also expected to participate in protest actions.

### **Former casino staff in Kyrgyzstan protest demanding jobs, compensation**

Around 200 former casino employees have protested in front of the Kyrgyz government building in Bishkek, demanding jobs and compensation, according to RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service.

Protesters say that the jobs of around 15,000 gambling industry employees were destroyed after casinos and gambling halls were shut down across the country under a new anti-gambling law that came into force on January 1.

Regular protests by former employees and supporters have taken place since the ban went into effect.

According to official statistics, cited by RFE/RL, the gambling industry annually contributes an estimated US\$11 million in taxes to Kyrgyzstan's economy.

There have been calls to create a single gambling zone in the Central Asian country, but parliament has so far rejected such proposals.

### **Rail strike in Israel against privatisation**

Israeli rail workers announced Monday, February 13, a possible nationwide strike over the country's intention to privatise certain services in the industry.

As part of the dispute, the workers have refused to put into service four new Spanish engines, citing safety concerns.

### **Israeli phosphate workers end strike after deal with management**

Phosphate miners ended a three-day strike on Tuesday after employers agreed to meet their demands, according to the head of the Trade Union for Workers in Mining and Metal Industries, Khaled Fanatsah.

On February 12, the miners began an open-ended strike demanding better working conditions.

### **Kruger National Park workers in South Africa strike**

Around 350 workers at the internationally renowned iconic Kruger National Park, including more than 200 rangers, have been on strike since February 3. They came out on strike demanding equal pay for workers doing similar work. The Kruger Park management is due to meet with rangers' representatives over the weekend.

### **Zimbabwean public sector workers demands not met**

Public sector workers have undertaken a series of actions over the recent period in their demand for a living wage (as defined by the government) of around US\$530. Currently, the average wage of public sector workers is around half this amount.

The number of public sector workers totals just under a quarter of a million, the vast majority of them being teachers.

The negotiations following the recent four-day strike between the unions and government resulted in public sector workers being given only an extra US\$58 housing and transport allowance.

The government claims there is no money to meet the workers' demands, yet ministers have recently seen their salaries rise to US\$3,000 a month together with an allowance of US\$105 a night. The government has big stakes in the diamond mining industry, but the money from the enormous profits earned does not end up in the government coffers.

### **Nigerian research institutes staff strike**

Workers belonging to the Academic Staff Union of Research Institutions, the Academic Staff Union of Colleges of Agriculture, Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational Associated Institutions and the Senior Staff Union of Research Development and Associated Institutions of Nigeria, went on indefinite strike this week. They are demanding the government fulfill past agreements made with the unions.

The demands include payment of arrears of a salary increase for the period July 2009 to June 2010, outstanding allowances, and the introduction of a proposed retirement age.

### **Tunisian municipal workers announce strike**

The syndicate of municipal workers has announced a four-day strike to begin February 20. The workers are demanding promised bonus payments

be paid in full and for temporary workers to be given permanent worker status. However, negotiations are continuing between workers' representatives and the government.

### **Kenyan health workers give notice of strike**

Health workers represented by an umbrella organisation, the Kenya Health Professionals Society, comprising 17 unions, have given notice of a strike to begin March 1.

The umbrella group of health workers was due to take part in joint strike action with the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union last year but pulled out when the government agreed to pay various allowances. However, the government reneged on its promises, and the workers are due to strike March 1 if the government fails to make good its promise in the meantime.

### **Namibian rail workers strike enters second week**

The strike by rail workers working for the government-owned TransNamib has entered its second week. The workers are maintaining their strike in spite of it being declared illegal by the labour court and the advice of their union, the Namibia Transport and Allied Workers Union, to comply with the order.

The workers were protesting the unequal way salary increase were imposed, with some workers being given increases but others not. The strike is costing the company around N\$1.5 million a day in revenues. The company resorted to instructing inspectors and supervisors to drive the railway locomotives in an attempt to restore some services.



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