

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

30 March 2012

## German air traffic grounded by pay strike

Air traffic at several airports across Germany came to a virtual standstill because of a strike by security workers, firemen and traffic personnel demanding a pay rise of 6.5 percent for more than two million members of the public sector union Verdi.

Hundreds of flights were cancelled at five airports Tuesday, among them Frankfurt, one of the busiest in the world. Also affected were Dusseldorf, Stuttgart and Munich.

The government presented a wage rise of 3.3 percent which was rejected by workers.

The national carrier Lufthansa cancelled 450 national and international flights and press media reported other strikes in Hamburg and the Rhineland, which were hit by stoppages of the bus service.

## Italian engineering trade unions to hold four-hour strike

One of the country's largest engineering trade unions, UILM (Unione Italiana Lavoratori Metalmeccanici/Italian Union of Metal worker and Mechanics), has said it intends to stage a four-hour national strike in protest at labour law reform following the example of the main union federation.

The unelected government of Prime Minister Mario Monti is seeking to undermine Article 18 of the employment code, which requires firms with more than 15 employees to reinstate workers considered by a court to have been dismissed unlawfully.

No specific strike date has been set by the union, just sometime "during the month of April".

## Welsh refuse collectors threaten work stoppage over pay cuts

Refuse collectors across Carmarthenshire, Wales are threatening to hold an unofficial strike over the Easter bank holidays over a cut in their wages. Carmarthenshire Council has scrapped the workers' bonus pay and triple pay package tied to working on bank holidays.

The proposed action could affect refuse collections on Good Friday, April 6, and Easter Monday, April 9.

"After angry meetings at council depots in Johnstown, Glanamman and Trostre in Llanelli, bin men have said they will simply refuse to work those days," said the *Carmarthen Journal*.

The paper quoted one worker as saying; "They've left us totally in the lurch."

The council has changed the pay of staff under a process called Single Status, which purports to equalise salaries across the council.

## Council workers in Ireland protest suspensions

Around 130 council workers stopped work and held a protest outside the Waterford County Council building in Dungarvan on March 27 in a dispute over the suspension of two colleagues.

According to the Unite union, the council suspended two workers "after refusing to give assurances over future employment" in the event of changes in the management of the county's water services.

*The Irish Times* reported that a "revised" operational structure for roads and water services was due to be implemented on Monday, but the council said "a number of employees failed to co-operate with the changes."

The paper also noted that the strike is "unofficial", according to the council, which said the union had not referred the dispute to the Labour Court or the Labour Relations Commission for arbitration.

## Polish workers protest plan to raise retirement age

Hundreds of workers affiliated to the Solidarity trade union protested outside the prime minister's office in Warsaw, March 26, against government plans to reform the pension system. Protests are set to continue all week against plans to raise the retirement age for both men and women to 67, according to the *Warsaw Voice*. Deputies are expected to vote today on whether a national referendum should be held on the planned changes to the pension system.

## Iberia pilots warn of 30 days of strikes over job threats from low-cost carrier

Pilots at the Spanish national carrier Iberia called 30 days of strikes on Tuesday in a dispute over the creation of a low-cost carrier Iberia Express, which they say threatens their jobs and conditions.

By some estimates, Iberia intends to divert 40 planes from the main group to the new subsidiary, which would mean the slashing of up to 8,000 jobs.

Iberia pilots will strike every Monday and Friday from April 9 to July 20.

Pilots held 12 days of strikes between December and March, but called

off industrial action after unions and management agreed to talks which broke down Sunday.

### **UK library staff strike in a defence of terms and conditions**

Library workers in the Cheshire West and Chester council area are set to strike on March 31 in a dispute over terms and conditions. Libraries to be picketed include Ellesmere Port, Chester, Winsford and Northwich, according to the web site of the union UNISON.

Cuts to conditions are set to come into force from the beginning of the new financial year, on April 1.

### **Egyptian public transportation workers sit-in**

Hundreds of striking public transportation workers began an open-ended sit-in Sunday in front of parliament.

The transport workers are calling for their authority to become affiliated with the Transportation Ministry and end-of-service payments equal to the sum of 100 monthly salaries.

### **Police seek to suppress education bill rally in Ankara**

Several hundred public employees gathered in Ankara, Turkey, March 28 to protest against the 4+4+4 Draft Bill on Education and the Draft Bill on Public Servants' Trade Unions.

Egitim Sen President Ünsal Yıldız claimed that the new system was going to have a negative effect on the future of children and called on the parents not to send their children to school on March 28 and 29.

Police reportedly took 85 demonstrators who travelled to Ankara from Adana on March 27 into police custody. Entry to the capital was denied to groups from Izmir, Aydın, Balıkesir, Manisa, Kocaeli, Bursa, Malatya, Batman, Urfa, Konya, Hatay, Zonguldak and Tokat, according to bianet.org.

Earlier, police had stopped some buses outside Ankara morning, but they were later allowed to enter the city, the daily *Hürriyet* reported: "The police first tried to prevent demonstrators from reaching the location of the rally, but changed policies when tension began to rise. The buses were then allowed to pass.

Protesters were then denied the right to march, and ordered to disband. Officials threatened to "interfere by force" if workers still insisted on marching.

Union leader, Lami Özgen, said a request had been made for an official permit for a joint protest with two other groups at Güvenpark but this was refused.

### **Namibian building workers strike**

Around 100 construction workers working on a new military academy at Okanhandja went on strike at the end of last week. They claimed their Chinese employer, Jiangsu, was failing to comply with labour laws.

The builders are members of the Namibia Metal and Allied Workers Union (MANWU). They accused their employer of not paying the legal minimum wage or providing protective clothing, adequate accommodation and toilet facilities.

Following discussion involving the union, Jiangsu and a Ministry of Defence official, the workers agreed to return to work if provided with protective clothing and for the other outstanding matters to be dealt with in the next two weeks.

### **Namibia: Security workers strike warning**

Around 300 security staff, represented by the Namibia Independent Security Union (NISU), are demanding N\$7 (\$0.90) an hour minimum wage. NISU called on other unions representing security staff to support their demand.

The last national agreement covering security staff was reached in 2009 and set the minimum wage at N\$3.80 (\$0.50) per hour. NISU has said it will call for strike action if negotiations do not begin soon.

### **Sacked dairy workers in Zimbabwe stage sit-in**

Eleven dairy workers at Kefalos Quality Dairy Produce were sacked last month after refusing to sign new contracts. The new contracts did not give details of gratuity payments and benefits paid on termination of contract.

The workers have refused to leave the dairy premises. A labour court ruled against the dismissal, but Kefalos went ahead and fired the workers. Kefalos employs around 130.

### **Benin teachers strike enters third month**

Teachers throughout Benin have been on strike since mid-January in pursuit of a 25 percent pay increase. Other government workers were awarded the increase.

Teachers' union leaders accuse President Boni Yayi of bowing to IMF pressure to cut the wages bill. The government has banned meetings of striking teachers. Two teachers were arrested along with two union representatives. The reps were later released.

The government has now stepped up its actions by deregistering striking teachers and has started hiring military conscripts as scabs.

### **Malawi power workers strike**

According to a *Nyasa Times* report, around 1,000 electricity supply workers at ESCOM's Chichiri power station staged a strike Monday in pursuit of a 35 percent pay increase. They picketed the site and prevented lorries entering or leaving.

The workers accuse the government of failing to address their demands over the last three years. One told a *Nyasa Times* reporter; "They are taking us for granted...the cost of living has risen and we need a pay rise...to survive."

The workers put the ESCOM board on notice that they would hold a nationwide strike next week if their pay demands were not settled.

### **South African platinum miners' strike**

Around 3,000 members of the National Union of Miners at the Modikwa platinum mine in the northern South African province of Limpopo went on strike last week.

Among their 36 outstanding demands is a 12 percent pay increase, an increase in their drill allowance to R500 (\$65) this year and R700 (\$91) next year.

Modikwa chief executive told the press, "We are losing millions of rands a day and we are working very hard to resolve the stalemate."

### **Nigeria: Oyo state workers continue fight for minimum wage**

The strike by around 40,000 Oyo state government workers demanding the state government implement the federal minimum N18,000 (\$114) wage continues.

The strike appears to have mass support. Schools are closed, the state secretariat offices are not operating and in some areas water supplies are being affected.

In a meeting with workers on Monday, the state governor vowed to implement the minimum wage.

### **Nigeria university staff strike**

Non-academic staff at Olabisi Onabanjo University went on strike last Friday over arrears of wage payment and misappropriation of funds. The university authorities have appealed to the workers to return, saying they had inherited the current financial crisis from a previous administration.

### **Nigerian polytechnic lecturers strike**

Lecturers at Lagos State Polytechnic began a one week strike Monday. Members of the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) are striking over non-payment of 18 months arrears following implementation of their salary scale agreement (CONPCASS).



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