

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

16 August 2013

## Europe

### Finnish air traffic controllers strike to protest restructuring

Finnish air traffic controllers struck on August 12 in opposition to the transfer of the Area Control Centre from Tampere, located 160 kilometres (100 miles) north of Helsinki, to Helsinki airport. AFP reported the strike was called by the Air Traffic Controllers Association (SLJY), representing more than 90 percent of the workers. The strike began at 1400 GMT and lasted until 0500 GMT the following day.

SLJY trade union leader Sami Fabritius said, "The transfer presents a problem from a security point of view". This is due to the fact that once the operation is transferred to Helsinki airport, "any technical breakdown would have consequences for air traffic control in the entire country", reported AFP.

The union has also raised concerns about possible job losses arising from the restructure.

"The centre currently coordinates all flights in Finnish airspace and air traffic between different airports, with the exception of the zones immediately surrounding airports, handling about 270,000 flights a year", said AFP.

During the strike, aviation authority Finavia put strikebreaking plans into operation, saying that some domestic flights would be cancelled but international flights would proceed as normal. Flights were handled by non-union air traffic control supervisors.

### Portuguese aviation workers to strike against worsening conditions

Portuguese aviation staff employed by Groundforce took strike action Thursday, after workers unanimously supported a three-day strike, *theportugalnews.com* reported.

Fernando Henriques of the Airport and Aviation union (SITAVA) said, "There are lots of reasons for this struggle and the strike on the 15th". Henriques added the dispute, "has been dragging on for some years, but it has become worse as working days have lengthened to nine or 10 hours."

The strike hit Lisbon airport the hardest as Groundforce is one of two handling companies. Flights affected could be those of British Airways, Lufthansa, TAP, Sata, Vueling, Aigle Azur and Air France. Others airports affected were Oporto, Funchal and Porto Santo.

SITAVA representative Fernando Henriques has previously stated that the protest would attract workers from the other four unions that represent air transport support service workers.

### Protests in Sicily continue against planned US satellite system base

On August 11, hundreds of protesters demonstrated in the southern Sicilian city of Niscemi against US plans to build a satellite communication system.

Niscemi already hosts 46 US military satellites and the new base is set to include a large radar and tens of radio antennas. The Mobile User Objective System (Muos) is being constructed by the US Navy.

The protests are the culmination of years of campaigning by residents who have claimed there has been a rise in health problems caused by radiation from the US operations.

In March, around 10,000 residents marched to oppose the proposed ultra-high-frequency satellite network.

Last year, the *nowitaly* web site reported that according to a study conducted by physicists Massimo Zucchetti and Massimo Coraddu of the Polytechnic University of Turin, the "electromagnetic waves emanating from Muos will spread out over 135 kilometres, with serious risk of causing, in the short and long term, severe degenerative disease in the population, such as cancer and leukaemia."

### Croatian farmers block roads to demand subsidy payments

On August 9 farmers blocked roads in eastern Croatia to protest cuts in subsidies to them by the government. The farmers are demanding that the government pays them the same amount for 2012 as it did in 2011. This equates to 600 million kuna (£68 million more than they have received so far).

The government refuses to pay more, citing the fact it had recently joined the European Union and was committed to slashing its public debt and reduce a budget gap projected to be 3.4 percent of GDP this year.

A Reuters report cited Tihomir Pokrovac, a farmers' representative, who said that around 1,000 tractors blocked the roads.

The protest went ahead following the breakdown of talks between farmers associations and the Agriculture Minister Tihomir Jakovina.

The police condemned the action as illegal, warning, "The organisers must announce the protests five days in advance, which they failed to do. Also, the protests must not take place on major roads."

### Postal workers in Somerset, England continue dispute

More than 100 postal workers at Bridgwater delivery office, Somerset, England continued their ongoing dispute with Royal Mail this week.

The staff, members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU), are protesting Royal Mail cuts and bullying by management. Their strike on August 12 was the second of the last week and their seventh overall.

In a statement posted on the Unite web site by a local shop steward, the union indicated that it was seeking to end the dispute but was being frustrated by management. After reporting that issues remain unresolved including, “un-agreed cuts to full-time jobs and overtime; failure to negotiate with the union; failure to pay money for previous savings; and too many bullying managers”, the statement adds, “Royal Mail, unlike many previous legal official and unofficial strikes at Bridgwater, are digging in and refusing to consider reasonable compromises.”

Further strikes are set to be held August 17 and August 19.

CWU members employed at 371 Crown Post Offices nationally are currently being balloted for strike action in a dispute over jobs, pay and threatened office closures. The result of the ballot is expected this week.

### **British glass workers’ union calls off planned strike**

The Unite trade union suspended a planned strike at Ardagh Glass in Yorkshire and Scotland just hours before it was due to begin on August 9.

Ardagh Glass workers based at factories in Irvine in Ayrshire, Scotland and in Barnsley, Doncaster and Knottingley in Yorkshire, England had voted overwhelmingly to strike in response to an inadequate pay offer from Ardagh which made £65 million in pre-tax profits last year. The 1,300 employees are represented by the Unite and GMB unions.

Following talks at the Leeds offices of government-backed Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service last week, Ardagh came up with another offer of 5.5 percent over two years. The deal represents a pay cut when inflation is taken into account. Currently both unions are balloting their members on the new offer. The ballot closes September 2.

Ardagh workers have already seen their final salary pension scheme closed and cuts to their sick pay scheme.

### **Local authority cleaners in London, England set to strike**

Nearly 60 local authority cleaners employed by contractors OCS have voted unanimously to go on strike in London. OCS provides cleaning services to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea’s arm-length agency the Tenants’ Management Organisation.

They are members of the GMB trade union and are currently paid £7.15 an hour—below the so-called London living wage of £8.55. The union put in a pay claim but in May OCS announced it would not give any increase this year, in spite of inflation running at over 3 percent during the last year.

### **Irish pilots at Aer Arann to strike**

Around 100 airline pilots working for Aer Arann, an Aer Lingus offshoot company, have voted to strike beginning next Tuesday. The action will comprise two days’ strike followed by two days’ work and then two further days on strike. The pilots are seeking a pay rise to recompense a four year pay freeze which followed a ten percent pay cut in 2009.

The pilots are represented by the Irish Airline Pilots’ Association (IALPA). According to IALPA, pilots working for Aer Arann are only earning €30,000 (\$40,000) even with ten years’ service.

### **Swiss postal workers unions to negotiate new contract**

Swiss Post, Switzerland’s postal operator is to negotiate a new contract with Swiss Post workers union Syndicom and the staff association Transfair.

Swiss Post employs over 60,000 workers and is regarded as the country’s third largest employer. In July this year it became a public limited company but is still state owned.

Hinting at job cuts and attacks on service conditions, a company spokesman said: “The negotiations ... represent an opportunity to modernise the collective employment contract and adapt it to meet future challenges.”

### **Striking Egyptian steel workers’ leaders arrested**

Police and army units, under orders from the ruling military regime arrested two leaders of a Suez Steel workers strike during their bloody clampdown and imposition of martial law on Monday. Amr Yusif and Abd-al-Rauf were arrested after armed forces surrounded the factory.

The previous day, 12 of the striking workers had been dismissed as they began their strike. They were insisting the company honour its February 2012 agreement to give them a profit-sharing bonus. The company claims to have made a loss but workers pointed out the company had donated 3 million Egyptian pounds (\$430,000) to help pay off the Egyptian national debt.

### **Israeli power workers walk out**

Administrative workers employed by Israel Electric Corporation’s (IEC) southern district have walked out on strike. This follows IEC’s decision to dock the pay of two workers.

The two workers had been taking part in ongoing sanctions refusing to provide data to independent power producers. The sanctions action was in response to the lack of progress over negotiations between the independent producers and IEC for the independent producers hooking up to the IEC network and also about reforms at the IEC utility.

### **Libyan oil workers’ action continue to affect production**

Oil exports from Libya have been cut as a result of ongoing industrial action and security concerns. At the beginning of the week, security guards at two of Libya’s main crude oil terminals, Es Sider and Ras Lanuf resumed their strike shortly after ending a previous two-week stoppage.

Libyan officials also raised concerns that oilfields and export terminals are being disrupted as militia groups fight for security contracts. Government figures seek to suggest oil production is back to pre-NATO

intervention levels but a *Voice of America* (VOA) report states insiders say the true figures are a quarter of a billion barrels a day lower than the government figures.

VOA quoted a foreign oil consultant saying: "The Libyan government is still a long way from consolidation control of the country's oilfields, pipelines and ports."

### **Ugandan university officials snub striking academics**

The Makerere University council has insisted the new academic year will begin and students will be admitted on August 17. This is in spite of a strike by academics at the university.

They are striking over the refusal of the university to implement an agreed 100 percent pay increase. The university has called on the academics to end their strike and continue negotiations.

### **Mauritanian gold miners' strike**

Around 1,500 gold miners at the Tasiast mine, 400 kilometres northeast of the Mauritanian capital Nouakchott, went on strike at the end of last week. The mine is owned by the Canadian company Kinross, which produced 185,000 ounces of gold last year and is said to have reserves of 8 million ounces.

They are demanding equal pay for those doing the same work, better medical facilities and for the company to respect the labour code.

### **Nigerian workers and students protest education cuts**

On Tuesday, protesters, including workers and students gathered in Lagos, Nigeria to protest public education cuts. Demonstrators brought traffic to a halt on the busy Ikorodu road, at the beginning of a national campaign. Protests were also held in Kano, Owerri and Calabar, according to the organisers.

The protest was organised by the Joint Action Forum (JAF) reported [allafrica.com](http://allafrica.com). A JAF secretary said, "The goal of this protest, by the time we have gone round the country, is to shut down the nation until they begin to take education seriously. Governments in Nigeria today operate anti-poor policies and they are not bothered about public education.

"Funding of public education is not given the priority it deserves, because the children of those in government and their friends are being trained in private schools in Nigeria and foreign countries with the looted funds."

In July, university teachers, members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) began an indefinite strike to protest the non-implementation of the Academic Earned Allowance (AEA), part of an agreement with the federal government in 2009.

The strike involves some 51 out of the 53 branches of the ASUU, with thousands of university students affected.





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