

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

22 November 2013

## Zagreb airport workers set to strike

Employees at Zagreb Airport in Croatia launched a two-day strike Thursday, following a breakdown in talks between an aviation trade union and management.

The strike is in protest at the concession agreement signed between the Croatian government and the airport's future operator Zagreb Airport International Company. EX-YU Aviation News reported that the workers trade union, "says the terms of the collective agreement are not being upheld and they are unhappy with their treatment on behalf of the Ministry for Sea, Transport and Infrastructure."

EX-YU Aviation News reported that the union presented seven conditions to management including, the immediate halt of the airport's takeover, an investigation into the concession agreement, pay guarantees for employees in advance of one year and appropriate government measures against the airport's management which the union says has 'damaged the airport's financial credibility and reputation'".

Further strikes are scheduled for November 25, November 28 and December 1.

## Action by Finnish airline staff cancelled

A strike by ground service staff, baggage handlers, ticket salespeople, check-in staff and mechanics—due to begin November 15—was cancelled after the Finnish Aviation Union (IAU), the Finnish Cabin Crew Union (SLSY) and Finnair management reached agreement on collective contracts.

The strikes, which threatened to halt virtually all airline traffic in Finland, were scheduled for November 15-23 and November 27-30.

Referring to the planned stoppage, IAU spokesman, Juhani Haapasaari had said, "It will be the biggest that's ever taken place in Finland."

Finnair estimated revenue would fall around €4.5 million per strike day.

Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen appealed in Parliament for an agreement to be reached by the union and Finnair. "Industrial action in the form of a wide-ranging strike is the last thing that this country needs right now. It would be a very unfortunate situation, and it would bring the country to its knees economically." *YLE News* said: "The PM's appeal came on the heels of the announcement by the Transport Union that it would support aviation union workers and cabin crew starting next Tuesday by suspending cargo handling. The Finnish Food Workers' Union and Trade Union Pro, the largest private sector union for clerical employees, both also announced Thursday that they would organise supporting strike action as of next Tuesday if the Finnair situation is not resolved."

Large-scale industrial action by catering staff—which would have led to further disruptions to Finnair services—was also averted this week when

an agreement was reached with LSG Sky Chefs.

## Georgian rail workers walk out

Around 6,000 workers on Georgian Railways went on strike November 14 to demand an agreement on overtime pay, a fair bonus system and bonuses for the length of service and qualifications.

Georgian Railways management, which had initially refused to negotiate on the three key issues, then agreed to negotiations, and after six hours of talks agreement was reached.

## Norwegian oil-platform workers protest

Around 1,400 oil-platform workers struck on November 15 in a dispute over pay. The workers, carrying out insulation and maintenance work for Bilfinger SE (GBF), Beerenberg Corp. AS and Kaefer GmbH, both off and onshore, are working at 45 percent capacity.

Last year, Norway's longest oil-worker strike disrupted production, prompting the government to intervene to avert a complete shutdown.

Norway is western Europe's largest producer of the fuels.

## Students protest against education cuts in Spain

On Wednesday Spanish teachers and students demonstrated in Madrid, Spain to protest austerity cuts, rising fees and attacks on the education system being imposed by the Popular Party government.

Protesters gathered at the Education Ministry in the capital.

Press TV spoke to one student who commented, "Public education is being privatized. It's not visible, but it is happening. This is going to lead to a situation where only rich people will be able to study; and the working class, like me, won't".

A teacher commented, "I am mainly against cuts. Over the last three years there have been more students in each classroom, while there are few teachers in every school. You can't really educate people in these conditions. It's impossible to work like this"

## Workers at Bord na Móna plant, Ireland to be balloted for strike

Workers at a Bord na Móna plant are to be balloted for industrial action, triggered by the company's decision to lock out workers after they rejected acceptance of unilateral changes to their contracts of employment.

Bord na Móna is a semi-state firm responsible for the mechanised harvesting of peat, primarily in the Midlands of Ireland.

According to the *Irish Examiner*, "The Bord na Móna craft group of unions has called on the company's chief executive, Gabriel D'Arcy, to intervene in a dispute which has arisen at its works at Blackwater in west Offaly."

It added, "The changes imposed by management are directed at 13 staff at the Blackwater facility, but unions have warned it could affect up to 200 staff."

### **Police forcibly disperse protest by Egyptian fabric workers**

Workers at the Samanoud Felt Fabric Company were protesting Saturday in Gharbiya over delayed wage payments and deteriorating working conditions, when police attempted to forcibly disperse them.

Six workers were injured in the operation, with security forces arresting three of the workers.

The *Egypt Independent/Al-Masry al-Youm* said: "The forces fired a barrage of gas bombs upon the demonstrators who were blocking railway lines and pelting police with stones. Negotiations to end the protest on the railroad tracks had failed."

Mohamed Sharshar, who heads the Health Ministry's department in Gharbiya, said the central hospital in Samanoud said injuries from the incident ranged from possible gunshots, suffocations and bruises.

"Hundreds of company workers have entered their third week of strike, stalling railway movement between the provinces of Damietta, Daqahlia and Gharbiya," said the *Egypt Independent/Al-Masry al-Youm*.

### **Sudanese teachers strike**

Teachers and other staff working in basic schools in the Rahad El Berdi area of South Darfur, Sudan struck over non-payment of wages this week. They had not received their October salaries. Around 320 teachers and school staff were affected.

### **Namibian security guards threaten Christmas walk-out**

Security guards, organised by the Namibia Security Guard and Watchmen's Union (NSGWU) are threatening to strike over the Christmas period if their demands, to the employers group Security Association of Namibia, are not met by December 15.

Around 100 security guards held a demonstration last Saturday in Windhoek to push their demands. They are demanding N\$8 (\$0.80) an hour or N\$2800 (\$275) a month for those with less than one year's service, up to N\$14.50 (\$1.40) an hour or N\$5220 (\$513) a month for those with four or more years' service. Currently NSGWU says guards are receiving around N\$5 (\$0.50) an hour. They are also demanding the end of arbitrary deductions, such as for uniforms, that can leave them with very little take home pay.

### **Namibian fish processing workers strike**

Around 150 fish processing workers employed by Gendor Holdings in Walvis, Namibia are currently on strike. They are represented by the Namibia Seamen and Allied Workers Union (NASAWU). Their demands include an N\$1 an hour pay increase, an N\$100 (\$10) increase in their housing allowance and for 12 workers who have been on temporary contracts since 1996 to be made permanent.

The company offered a 90 cents an hour increase and for the housing allowance to be increased by N\$50. Negotiations have been taking place since May; NASAWU told the press, sea-going workers at NovaNam, a company affiliated to Gendor may join in the strike.

### **Nigerian doctors continue action**

Resident doctors and other staff at the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital remain on strike even though doctors at other teaching hospitals have suspended their action. They claim they are owed arrears of six months' salary.

The suspended nationwide action by the other resident doctors had been called over outstanding salary arrears and for the proper implementation of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System by the Federal Government.

### **Striking South African farmworkers win court ruling**

Nearly 150 farmworkers employed by JF le Roux in South Africa, who had taken strike action to demand the stoppage of deductions from their wages, successfully challenged their eviction in court Monday; with the ruling that their hostel accommodation be re-instated.

They had been evicted from their le Roux-owned hostel on the Broodkraal Estate in Western Cape.

The workers claimed that following the farmworkers strike around a year ago in support of an increased minimum wage, which ended when the minimum wage was raised to R105 9\$10) a day, employers had used enhanced deductions from their pay to claw money back.

The workers are members of the Bawsi Agricultural Workers Union of South Africa. The union said that the strike, which had been suspended because of the court action, will resume.

### **South African chrome miners end underground sit-in**

On Monday 75 miners employed at Glencore Chrome in Rustenberg in north west South Africa ended their underground sit-in which began on Thursday last week. The miners, members of the National Union of Mineworkers, had taken the action to protest against being asked to do extra weekend shifts without pay. They are also pushing for a wage increase.



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