

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

10 April 2015

Europe

Strike of French air traffic control staff

Air traffic controllers organised in the SNCTA union held a 48 hour strike Wednesday and Thursday. The action is over the attack on working conditions, in particular the plans to raise the retirement age for air traffic control staff from 57 to 59.

SNCTA has planned for further action between April 16 to 18 and from 29 April to May 2.

Two day strike by German postal workers

Around 20,000 postal staff organised by the Verdi union were on strike Wednesday and Thursday. The strike followed plans by Verdi to launch a law suit against the privatised mail company Deutsche Post to prevent it introducing a two tier wage structure to be applied to new employees.

The union is also seeking a two and a half hour reduction in the working week with no loss of pay. Deutsche Post handles around 80 million letters and parcels a day.

Strike by Portuguese rail staff brings service to a halt

Railway workers employed by the state-owned Comboios de Portugal (CP) walked out on April 2 to begin a four day strike, which brought the network to an almost complete standstill over the Easter holiday period.

CP is looking to reduce a nearly \$5 billion debt burden by attacking the conditions of its staff. According to the Federation of Transport and Communications Union, the company was not prepared to pay the full amount due in vacation pay and for covering bank holidays and so the workforce took strike action.

A press report Monday talked of 95 percent of CP's ticket offices closed and around 85 percent of train journeys cancelled.

One day strike by staff at Dunnes Irish department stores

Over 5,000 staff employed by Dunnes in the Irish Republic held a one day strike April 2. Over 100 stores were affected. The members of the Mandate union were demanding secure hours and pay, job security and the right to union representation. Many shoppers supported the strike by boycotting stores on the day. More than two thirds of union members voted in favour of the action.

One woman staff member on the picket line in Wexford told the press that although having worked for the store for 15 years

she was restricted to a 15 hour a week contract which did not represent a living wage.

Dunnes also has stores in Northern Ireland, but its workers are not unionised. However, other unions demonstrated support for the workers in the Republic by holding protests outside the stores. In Belfast around 25 trade unionists held a protest outside Dunnes' city centre store, calling on Dunnes' management to negotiate with trade unions.

Strike threat by UK teachers in conference

Delegates of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) at their annual conference in the Northern English town of Harrogate voted in favour of a motion an industrial action and a campaign with the threat of strike action to oppose further government cuts in education.

The motion delivered a six-month ultimatum to whoever forms the next government to reverse current cuts to the service. The UK general election takes place on May 7.

The leader of the union, Christine Blower told delegates, "Teachers have seen job losses, worsening working conditions and restrictions on pay progression. Many serving teachers have been driven out of the profession..."

The NUT and other teaching unions organised various ineffectual one day strike actions during the tenure of the last Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, while signing up to changes pushed through by the government

Seven week strike by Finnish icebreaker workers ends

A seven week strike of around 200 employees working for the state owned icebreaking company, Arctia Shipping, ended just before the start of the Easter holidays. The Finnish Seafarers' Union and the Finnish Ship Engineers' Union came to an agreement with the company following the intervention of national conciliator Minna Helle.

The unions had threatened to escalate the dispute over the Easter holiday period by bringing out all its members in sympathy action.

Under the agreement, the collective agreement the unions have with Arctia Shipping will be applied to the whole shipping sector. No details of the agreement were available in posted press reports, but Helle stated that both sides had made concessions.

Maltese HSBC staff strike

A strike by members of the Malta Union of Banking

Employees (MUBE) working for HSBC, which began last Saturday, continued this week with members deciding at daily meetings to continue the strike. The strike has been overwhelmingly supported by the 900 HSBC staff. It has affected the bank's headquarters and branches throughout Malta. The company's Swieqi call centre is not involved in the action, as it is run by a separate company.

The strike action follows the company's renegeing on its collective agreement signed with the union in August last year. Members of the General Workers' Union employed by HSBC have been instructed by the union to support the MUBE action.

Middle East

Israeli chemical company threatens further job cuts

The management of Israeli Chemicals Limited (ICL) sent a letter Sunday threatening to lay off a further 57 staff at its Bromine compounds facility in the south of the country. The Histadrut union has carried out a series of strikes against ICL over its intention to cut 140 jobs at its Bromine compounds factory.

ICL says it has been able to meet orders for bromine chemicals from its store of products, but would not be able to continue to do so. It said future failure to fulfil orders would lead to customers resorting to other suppliers which would mean 57 jobs at the Bromine compounds facility would be surplus to requirements.

There have been several sympathy strikes in towns in the south by other workers. A planned general strike throughout the south by Histadrut did not go ahead, with the union citing the imminent general election as the reason.

Africa

Kenyan truckers strike to win union recognition

Truck drivers employed by Agility Logistics, Kenya, a Kuwaiti-owned company, had been striking to establish a union. The drivers were protesting having to work 24 hours, seven days a week for poor wages which did not meet their families' needs.

Agility CEO said he was unwilling to recognise the Kenya Long Distance Drivers and Allied Workers Union.

On April 1 the company locked out its employees, threatening that they would only be allowed back to their workplace if they signed up with a labour agency, effectively losing all their employment rights.

According to the International Transport Workers Federation,

drivers were being sent out in convoys with police escorts from fear they may resume their strike.

Mauritanian miners return with no deal

Over 3,000 Mauritanian miners went back to work April 3, after a two month strike without their demands being met. The strike, which had launched with 90 percent support, had been called demanding the implementation of a wage agreement negotiated last year.

SNIM, the 75 percent state-owned company which runs the mine, reinstated the 400 workers disciplined during the strike. Company President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz said a wage increase was "inappropriate," given the slump in iron ore prices.

The company insists any future wage increase will have to be based on a productivity deal.

Municipal staff at Zimbabwean city protest non-payment of wages

Council workers in the Zimbabwean city of Gweru have lodged an application to strike over non-payment of December's wages. They did not receive November's wages until March.

They demonstrated outside the council assembly offices April 1 protesting unpaid monthly wages and bonuses (on several occasions), lack of protective clothing and other outstanding issues.

Banners accused municipal managers of corruption, saying they claimed allowances and travel costs for their own use rather than for the benefit of the city.

Ethiopian hotel staff sacked for joining union

Sixty workers at the Sheraton hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, part of the Starwood Group Inc, have been sacked for joining a trade union. Some of them had 16 years of service with the company.

A similar dispute is underway at a Sheraton hotel in the Maldives, where 10 union officials and 100 members have also been sacked. A proposed meeting of union members was banned at the hotel on the basis that the island was private property. The Starwood Group Inc. boasts of being the most global high-end hotel company in the world, with 1,200 plus hotels and resorts.

The international Union of Food Workers held a demonstration outside the Le Méridien, a Sheraton hotel in Piccadilly, London to highlight the Ethiopian and Maldives hotel workers' case.



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