

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

29 April 2016

## Strike by French rail workers

Staff at France's state-run national rail service SNCF came out on strike at 7 p.m. on Monday, returning to work at 8 a.m. on Wednesday. The biggest impact of the strike was on Wednesday, when many services were affected.

According to press reports only half of the scheduled TGV high-speed trains operated and 40 percent of the regional TER trains. Services in Paris were badly hit.

The strike was in response to proposed changes to working conditions.

SNCF is changing the rules for paying for travel to work expenses. Currently, staff can claim for commuting expenses over three kilometers; SNCF wants to increase this to 50 kilometers. Among other proposed changes is reducing the number of two consecutive days' leave, currently set at 52 per year, down to 30. They also want to reduce the number of hours allowed between shifts from 14 to 13, increase the number of nights staff can be expected to be away from home from one to two, or three at a time and to get rid of the advanced notice of shift changes.

## German airport ground staff in walkout

Public sector employees at German airports, including ground services staff, security staff, fire fighters and check-in operators held a one-day strike Wednesday.

Among the airports badly affected were Frankfurt, Munich, Dusseldorf, Dortmund, Cologne and Hanover. Lufthansa said it had cancelled 60 percent of scheduled flights, while Germany's second largest operator, Air Berlin, had to cancel over 40 internal flights.

The airport staff, members of the union Verdi, are seeking a 6 percent pay rise. They recently rejected a 3 percent increase to be paid over two years. Talks between the union and the employer resumed on Thursday.

## Strike at UK Southern Rail

Rail workers employed by Southern Rail held a one-day strike this week over plans to bring in driver-only operated trains, doing away with the conductor/guard doors and safety procedures roles. The

company is in talks with the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) to try to avert further strikes planned for May 10 and 12.

## Council staff in Scottish city of Glasgow to be balloted for action

Thousands of staff working for Labour-controlled Glasgow city council, organised by the GMB, Unite and Unison unions, are to be balloted for possible strike action. The decision was taken after the council announced its intention to class six public holidays as leave days. The move will affect residential care workers, refuse collectors and emergency social work teams, who normally work the public holidays, to provide essential cover and receive enhanced pay.

According to the unions the change will mean an average loss of around £600 a year.

## National Museum of Wales dispute escalates

Employees at the six National Museum of Wales (NMW) sites throughout Wales began an all-out strike Thursday. The members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) had previously held strikes over the past few months, mainly on weekends and bank holidays, over plans to abolish enhanced pay for weekend and bank holiday working.

## Greek ferry staff to join one-day protest

Greek ferry workers organised by the Panhellenic Seaman's Federation (PNO) announced they will take part in the planned one-day strike on May 8 called by the private sector union body, the GSEE. The one-day strike is in opposition to the Syriza-led coalition government's planned pension reforms.

## Irish transport workers push for substantial pay raise

Rail staff working for Iarnrod Eireann (Irish Rail) are to be balloted

for strike action. They are seeking a 25 percent pay rise and are represented by the National Bus and Rail Union (NBRU) and the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU). Any strike action would consist of withdrawal of labour for several hours per day.

A planned strike by Irish tram drivers in Dublin on Thursday went ahead. They are seeking a 26.5 percent pay raise. The strike follows several strikes over past months, with more scheduled. Talks between the tram operator, Transdev, and SIPTU on Monday were unsuccessful. Tram drivers are also opposed to plans to introduce lower pay rates and longer shifts for new drivers.

### **Strike by Italian cement producer staff over proposed job cuts**

Employees of the Italian cement producer, Italcementi, are on strike today. They are represented by the unions Feneal Uil, Filca Cisl and Cgli Fillea. The strike is in protest at plans for job cuts by HeidelbergCement, the German multinational poised to take over the company. HeidelbergCement proposes over 400 job cuts this year and a further 250 next year as part of its restructuring plans.

### **Norwegian hotel staff walkout spreads**

Last weekend around 3,500 hotels and restaurant staff in Norway began strike action. Nearly 400 hotels and restaurants have been hit so far. It has impacted Norway's largest hotel chain, Thon Hotels, and on Sunday, the Raddison Blu Plaza hotel in Oslo was forced to close its doors with guests having to make alternative arrangements. Talks on Monday between employees and hotel employer representatives, NHO, were deadlocked.

The union representing hotel and restaurant staff is pushing for a wage increase and the right to conduct local negotiations with hotels and restaurants. Press reports indicated the strike, which was well supported, was likely to spread. The weak state of the krone, the Norwegian currency, has produced a boom in hotel and restaurant visits by foreign tourists.

### **Protest by Ukrainian nuclear power staff**

Employees of Energoatom, the Ukrainian state nuclear power company, held a rally in the capital, Kiev, on Tuesday. The day was chosen to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster. They held the rally to protest the government's freezing of the company's assets.

The asset freeze has left the company unable to purchase new nuclear materials to maintain the operation of its four plants, and is threatening to affect payment of wages. The assets were frozen as a result of a court order over unpaid debts.

### **Strike pending for Kenyan public sector workers**

The Kenyan Trades Union Congress (TUC) has threatened a strike by public sector workers over unpaid wages. A deadline has been set for the government to sign collective bargaining agreements before the budget is established for 2016-17.

The bargaining agreements are outstanding for teachers, university staffs, and council workers. Dockworkers and others are yet to be signed. The TUC's deadline to strike is July 1. It complains that while private sector workers have had minimum wage increases, workers in the public sector have missed out.

### **South African airline imposes wage deal**

South African airline operator Comair has settled a wage dispute with the United South African Airlines workers' union. Airline workers, who manage the baggage handling, ticketing, security checks and other duties, were locked out of their workplaces when they refused to accept the imposition of a management settlement.

The workforce's claim for a 35 percent increase over three years was rejected by Comair and the original management offer of 22.5 percent over three years was imposed. Other aspects of the dispute, such as safety, are still under discussion.

### **Namibian airline food supply workers protest**

Workers providing in-flight food for airlines at Hosea Kutako International Airport delayed outbound flights on Monday when Namibia Commercial Catering, Food and Allied Workers' Union members working for Flamingo In-Flight Catering demonstrated against their work conditions.

They complained security guards employed by the Namibia airports use force against them and treat them with disrespect. They are put through inhuman searches, sworn at and shouted at and are under constant stress. Although when they complain, promises are made that the incidents will be looked into, nothing ever happens.

The Namibian Protection Services, the airport security company, are making a counter-claim against Flamingo workers, claiming assaults on their personnel.



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