

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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## Europe

### Transport workers' dispute in Finland continues

Transport workers at eight of Finland's largest ports, including that in the capital, Helsinki, held a 24-hour stoppage on April 14. A spokeswoman for the Finnish Transport Workers Union said that up to 3,500 of Finland's 4,000 workers joined the industrial action, which affected the movement of some maritime exports but did not disrupt passenger traffic. The strike led to the closure of some paper and pulp mills around the country.

The trade unions originally called the strike in an attempt to force employers to speed up contract negotiations. The government then ordered that the planned strike be delayed until at least April 29. Employees at several smaller ports began wildcat strikes in response to this ultimatum, and workers at the larger ports then joined the action.

The dispute began last November, with the trade unions demanding a collective agreement for port workers. Other issues in the dispute relate to the status of temporary workers, as well as night and overtime work.

### Underground staff in Glasgow, Scotland, continue strike action

Glasgow underground train workers continued their campaign of strike action this week. On April 15, the workers began two days of industrial action against Strathclyde Passenger Transport (SPT). The strike was the fourth such stoppage held over issues relating to pay and changes to holiday rosters.

The strike resulted in the closure of the Glasgow underground service, disrupting the travelling schedules of thousands of passengers. The Transport & General Workers' Union said that drivers were concerned over the SPT's plans to finance a pay increase with countermeasures that would compromise safety for drivers, station masters, and other subway staff.

### Flight attendants strike in Greece and Italy

On April 19, flight attendants employed by Olympic

Airlines in Greece held a three-hour strike to protest the government's plan to privatise the company.

The action led to the cancellation and delay of a number of flights. The previous day, civil aviation unions called for a 24-hour strike to be held on April 21 in a dispute over back-pay claims for December 2004 and other work expenses.

In a similar dispute in Italy, flight attendants employed by the Italian state carrier Alitalia held a four-hour strike, also on April 19, in protest against restructuring plans that will see at least 3,700 job losses. The stoppage resulted in the cancellation of 168 flights.

The industrial action is the latest in a series of stoppages by the airline's staff.

### Romanian postal workers' union agree to government pay demands

On April 18, 35,000 postal workers in Romania began a planned 10-day strike for a pay increase. The workers, who currently earn a monthly salary of just 6.3 million lei (US\$225; €175), demanded a 16 percent raise.

Management said that they could not afford the increase and added that wage rates were monitored by a Romanian government agreement with the International Monetary Fund.

As the strike began, management at the postal service said they would meet with officials of the postal workers' union, the FSPR (Union Federation of the Romanian Postal Service). On April 20, the FSPR called off the strike after striking a deal with management. The union accepted a mere 3 percent pay increase, plus a Christmas bonus of 1.5 million lei (€43).

## Middle East

### Israeli post shuts down

Employees of the Israel Postal Authority shut down all postal branches April 18 in protest against delays in changing the Postal Authority into a government company.

All post offices handling internal activities such as sorting, transferring shipments, mail distribution and telegram services were affected. Also hit were postal branches serving the public, primarily with over-the-counter services, such as receiving and mailing regular and registered mail items,

telegrams and parcels, facsimile services, post office box services and monetary transactions.

Workers at the Postal Authority claim that the Ministries of Finance and Communications are not negotiating with them in good faith, thereby delaying the Postal Authority's change in status for months.

## **Africa**

### **Nigerian doctors strike for promised pay rise**

On April 15, doctors in Borno state, Nigeria, went on strike for an indefinite period to protest against the state government's failure to honour the nationally agreed 22 percent increase in basic salary.

The doctors are members of the Resident Doctors Association (RDA). The president of the Borno state local, Dr. Ibrahim Ngulde, told journalists that the decision to strike was taken at an emergency meeting of the Association held April 12. Ngulde complained that there was a shortage of doctors in the health sector throughout the state because of "an exodus of over 60 doctors and other health professionals in the last five years, largely due to inappropriate remuneration and lack of incentives leading to low morale and productivity."

Previously, when the RDA took nationwide strike action over the expected 22 percent increase, the Borno state local did not take part, preferring instead to enter talks with the state government.

### **Namibian metal workers, teachers launch industrial actions**

Seventy-six workers employed by Cymot, a Namibian hardware and outdoor leisure equipment dealership, refused to attend a company disciplinary hearing after the end of their strike. The action was called in opposition to the dismissal of a worker for alleged insubordination.

On April 13, High Court Judge Nic Hannah issued Cymot's management a court order banning the strikers from coming within 100 metres of the company premises. Managers declared that the strike was illegal and suspended the strikers.

The Metal and Allied Namibia Workers Union (Manwu) want management to reinstate the worker who was dismissed, but having ended the strike, it is now hoping that the Office of the Labour Commissioner will step in to mediate.

Also in Namibia, around 200 teachers held a demonstration on April 12 in the city of Keetmanshoop. The teachers, members of the Teachers Union of Namibia, were protesting the disparity between salaries of teachers in primary schools and their counterparts in secondary schools and newly appointed teachers. Primary school teachers receive far lower salaries.

They were also protesting against pension, leave and

housing subsidy conditions, and demanded better facilities for further study. The demonstrators presented a petition to the regional education deputy director and requested that it be sent to the education minister.

### **Liberian telecom workers set up blockades**

Workers of the Liberia Telecommunications Corporation (LTC) last week mounted roadblocks at intersections in the Liberian capital, Monrovia. The blockades were broken up by Liberian National Police, backed by forces with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Several workers were arrested.

The LTC has been put out to tender, and the workers are angry at the delay in the confirmation of the winner of the contract. The company's bidding committee said that Universal Telephone Exchange had won, but Gyude Bryan—chairman of the transitional government of Liberia—has delayed making the announcement. Workers fear that the delay is due to Bryan's preference for another company, in which he has a financial interest.

Workers also demanded wages owed to them over the past six months. Two employees have reportedly died due to starvation caused by the company's refusal to pay the wages.

### **Ugandan railway workers return to work**

A two-week strike by Ugandan railway workers was called off by trade union officials April 13. The Uganda Railways Corp. employees went on strike to demand that their benefits and pensions not be cut because of the company's pending privatisation.

The workers' union halted the industrial action without securing any guarantees from the company or the government. Union officials will, however, now be represented on a joint body alongside management and officials implementing the privatisation. This body will determine how workers' pensions and benefits are calculated.



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