

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

2 November 2012

## Striking Air France workers clash with police

Hundreds of striking Air France workers clashed with police last Saturday, during a demonstration in one of the departure halls of Paris's Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport.

The protesters and police scuffled, "knocking over planters and surprising travelers waiting for flights. The terminal was crowded because it is the start of a nationwide two-week school vacation in France," reported *Associated Press*.

The airline workers were protesting a restructuring plan decided by Air France management that aims to cut 10 percent of the workforce.

## Thousands protests in Madrid against austerity measures

Thousands from across Spain joined protests in the capital, Madrid, over the weekend, against austerity measures and called on the government to resign.

The demonstrators gathered at the heavily policed parliament building, held a minute's silence "with their backs to parliament, then shouted 'resign' with fists clenched," according to the BBC.

Sabine Alberdi, protesting in Madrid, told *Agence France-Presse*, "I came to demonstrate because they're taking everything away, our health, our education, our houses."

Anti-austerity protests also took place in Barcelona, Valencia and other cities.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's government plans spending cuts of around €40 billion for next year. A quarter of the working-age population in Spain are now unemployed.

## Teachers at Stratford Academy in England strike over being penalised for work-to-rule

Teachers at Stratford Academy in Newham, East London, went on strike last week after their monthly pay was docked for taking part in national work-to-rule action over pay, working conditions and pensions.

School management claimed the teachers were "in breach of contract".

The school stayed open, with pupils coming in for part of the day.

School governors deducted 15 percent of the latest monthly pay of teachers taking part in the ongoing industrial action.

The National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers issued a mealy-mouthed response, stating that the national industrial action was not a work-to-rule

because members are being encouraged to do and are still doing voluntary activities, such as leading clubs in their own time after school.

"What teachers are being told not to do is to take part in more than three lesson observations a year (where senior or other staff sit in on lessons), attend meetings outside of the normal day, prepare more than one written report to parents and cover for absent colleagues."

They said nothing that would indicate action in opposition to victimisation of their members.

Academy schools are privately controlled but state funded. They receive a similar amount from the government as state schools. However, because they are free from any local authority control, academies are given extra cash for the services that councils would have otherwise provided. Academies are also not bound by rules and regulations governing the pay and conditions of senior staff.

## Aer Lingus workers plan two-hour stoppage

Workers at Aer Lingus in Ireland are to go on a two-hour stoppage November 19 after talks on pensions broke down between management and unions Tuesday.

The IMPACT, SIPTU, TEEU and Unite trade unions are urging the Labour Relations Commission to reconvene negotiations between them and Dublin Airport Authority (DAA).

## Polish miners mount 24-hour strike

Polish miners held a 24-hour strike October 19. The strike, which began at Jastrzebska Spolka Weglowa SA (JSW SA), is due to a disagreement with the management board regarding the introduction of new labour contracts for newly hired employees and wages.

Management intends to impose contracts violating the national labour law as well as the previous agreement with unions, including an agreement signed in May concerning the privatisation of JSW SA.

According to *IndustriALL Global Union*, "The union demands withdrawal of unfavourable contracts for new employees and an increase of salaries by 3.8 percent. The company declared 50 percent of workers participated in the strike and announced Z17 million (€4.1 million) losses in revenues as a direct result of the strike. The union dismisses the data as unreliable..."

The JSW Group is the largest producer of high-quality coking coal and an important coke producer in the European Union. By the end of 2011, the group employed almost 30,000 workers.

scheme. The Fisheries Observer Agency (FOA) offered a 10.1 percent pay increase. The strike took place after negotiations between NAPWU and FOA broke down Tuesday.

### **Workers at Iranian sugar factory protest 18 months' unpaid wages and benefits**

Around 60 workers and their families at the Ahwaz Sugar Factory gathered outside the governor's office over the weekend in protest of 18 months of unpaid wages and benefits.

The ownership of Ahwaz Sugar factory, which has a 250-ton capacity, was transferred to a bank in 2008. Production ceased until further notice, and its workers, with the exception of maintenance workers and mechanics (who are also currently protesting), were laid off.

Before 2008, the factory employed 500 workers directly and 2,000 workers indirectly.

### **Strike for back pay by workers at Azad dam in Iranian Kurdistan**

According to the reports by the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers Organisations, Jahad Tosse workers, the contractor for Azad Banir Dam, took industrial action October 19 to demand back pay.

Azad dam is located near Ngill village on the Sanandaj/Marivan road in Iranian Kurdistan.

A total of 335 workers are employed at the dam. Security, heavy truck and ambulance drivers were among those who took part in the protests.

"After 3 days of work stoppage, the employer promised one month back wages on the condition of workers ending the strike. The workers vowed to continue the protests if the employer promises are not kept," said *Iran Labour Report*.

### **Iranian textile workers protest unpaid wages**

Fifty workers at a Mazandaran Textile Factory are involved in a protest over 26 months of unpaid wages.

The workers say they have made repeated protests in front of the governor and provincial offices but have so far not received their wages.

*Radio Zamaneh* quoted Nosratollah Daryabeigi, executive director of Mazandaran House of Workers, as saying, "Ghaemshahr Textile Factory workers are victims of mistaken government policies around the unregulated import of goods as well as government subsidy reforms."

He added that the workers' problems stem from "mismanagement and unchecked privatisation."

Daryabeigi pointed out that "the president made many promises to revitalise this company when he's made trips to the province, but nothing ever came of it."

### **Namibian fish observers strike**

Around 200 fish observers at Luderitz and Walvis Bay went on strike Wednesday. They are represented by the Namibia Public Workers Union (NAPWU) and are seeking a 13 percent pay increase, together with increases in allowances and employer contributions to their medical aid

### **Namibian teachers strike**

Around 400 teachers in the Khomas region went on strike Monday in pursuit of a 40 percent pay increase together with increases in allowances and a tax-free 13th cheque. They were joined by 200 primary and secondary teachers in the Otjozondjupa region. The following day, 200 primary and secondary school teachers at Walvis Bay and Swakopmund joined the strike.

They are members of the Namibia National Teachers Union (NANTU), but the union leadership has condemned the strikers and suspended the Khomas regional leadership. The Teachers Union of Namibia has declared its support for the strike and said it may also take strike action.

### **Ugandan medics strike**

Around 150 medical staff, including nurses, doctors and paramedics at the Mbarara regional referral hospital, went on strike Monday. They were protesting the non-payment of wages from May to September and unauthorised deductions from their accounts by the employer. The employer said the deductions were to adjust earlier overpayments. The medics have not been issued with payslips since January of this year.

### **Nigerian Ekiti state local government workers' strike continues**

Local government workers in the southwestern Nigerian state of Ekiti have been on strike for seven weeks in pursuit of a N19,300 minimum wage paid to all other Ekiti state civil servants. The chair of the Ekiti state Peoples Democratic Party, Makanjuola Ogundipe, accused the state governor, Kayode Fayemi, of failing to keep his promise to pay the local government workers the N19,300 minimum wage and added he had heard that 8,000 of them are threatened with the sack.

### **Striking oil workers imprisoned in Angola**

Fifteen oil workers who went on strike on an offshore oil platform have been arrested in the coastal town of Soyo in Angola but have not yet been charged. They had begun a strike on the oil platform in early October, protesting a cut in wages when their employer changed. They were also protesting the eight-to-nine-hour hazardous sea journey to take them to and from shore to the platform. Expatriate workers and some others are ferried to and from the platform by helicopter. The strike was ended when police landed on the platform and took them off.

### **Postal workers strike in South Africa**

Postal workers in the North Eastern province of Gauteng, which includes Pretoria and Johannesburg, are on strike demanding a R2,000 increase, a R1,000 housing allowance increase and a R1,200 bonus.

They are calling for the Postbank to be transformed into a state bank and all casual employees to be made permanent.

Around 250 marched from the headquarters of the COSATU trade union federation, COSATU House, in the Braamfontein suburb of Johannesburg, to local post offices to press their demands.



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