

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

8 February 2001

Belgium airline pilots begin unofficial strike

Airline pilots in Belgium began unofficial strike action on February 7, in a dispute over a new contract and restructuring. The 140 pilots involved in the action are employed by the Sabena airline.

The strike followed all-night talks between management and pilots' representatives in the Belgian Cockpit Association. The company and the union have been negotiating over a £228 million (\$333m) restructuring plan which pilots say could lead to the possible loss of 700 jobs.

Airline workers in Ireland strike in pay and compensation disputes

Cabin crew employed by the Irish airline Aer Lingus took 24-hour strike action on February 7 in a dispute over pay. The strike grounded virtually the airline's entire fleet with the company cancelling some 200 flights. Only scheduled flights involving aircraft returning to Ireland from abroad were going ahead.

Around 1,300-cabin crew staff are involved in the strike. They are members of the Impact trade union. The strike follows a rejection by the staff of the company's previous pay offer. The staff rejected that offer by an overwhelming majority of 98 percent. The cabin crew plan to hold a further strike on February 16 if the company do not improve the terms of their pay offer.

In another dispute, ground staff employed by British Midland and based at Dublin airport began indefinite strike action on February 5 in a dispute over their transfer to Gatwick Haulage International Ltd. The workers are demanding more compensation for the move, and say the terms offered by British Midland are not satisfactory.

The strike action involves some 160 baggage handlers and check-in staff.

Hungarian airline maintenance workers strike in pay dispute

On February 5, Hungarian aircraft maintenance

workers began strike action in an ongoing dispute over pay. The strike began at 18.30 local time, when 840 employees of Aeroplex Kft walked off the job. Aeroplex Kft is a subsidiary of the state airline Malev Rt.

The strike resulted in the cancellation or delay of many flights scheduled by Malev at the main Ferihegy international airport. The company said that they would see a daily loss of 20 million forints (\$70,000) in revenue due to the industrial action.

Trade unions representing the staff originally demanded a pay increase of 25 percent but have now lowered this figure to 15 percent. Malev has offered a rise of 7 percent, plus a further 2 percent in July, "if certain quality demands are met."

Malev CEO Erzsebet Antal said, "The question now should not be what pay rise we can give, but rather what efficiency-improving measures we can carry out together with our employees". He said that the company would continue to meet with the unions and that he expected to reach an agreement with them shortly.

The airline also announced that it had signed contracts to carry out maintenance work at foreign airports.

At present Marek is a loss-making enterprise, owned by APV Rt, the state privatisation agency. The agency had planned to sell Malev earlier this year but the sale failed, after all seven potential investors withdrew from bidding.

Transport workers in Paris continue strike over pay and conditions

On February 1, French transport workers in Paris began a 24-hour strike in a dispute over pay and conditions. The strike affected large sections of the city's Metro underground railway network as well as bus and suburban train services.

It was estimated that the strike resulted in more than 250 kilometres of traffic jams on the main roads into

Paris.

The strike action by the transport staff is the latest in a series of strikes by public sector workers across France.

Rolls-Royce workers in England to strike against job losses

Workers at the Ansty Rolls-Royce engineering factory near Coventry, England have voted to strike for one day on February 9. If the strike goes ahead, it would be the first at the plant in more than 20 years.

The workers are protesting against the company's decision to cut jobs at the plant and to transfer some of its operation to Canada.

The strike follows a breakdown in talks between the company and unions representing the workforce. The general secretary of the Manufacturing Science and Finance union said that the union hoped to avoid any industrial action taking place. He said, "We will work to avoid a strike, but we need the company to show that it is willing to listen by withdrawing redundancy notices and entering into constructive talks".

Doctors on strike in Lagos, Nigeria

Resident doctors at Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) have this week begun a strike to demand payment of overdue salaries going back four months. They are also seeking redress for other contentious issues, including irregular deductions in doctors' salaries, over-taxation, and exorbitant charges on rent and electricity.

According to Dr. Afolayan, vice-president of the Association of Resident Doctors (ARD), "the management of LUTH has refused to pay resident doctors their salaries for three and a half months now. We are owed salaries for the months of October, November and 50 percent of December 2000 as well as January 2001... Our salaries are deducted without any explanation. For over six months we have not received our pay slips."

Dr. Ijimakinwa, President of the ARD said, "the decay in the infrastructure here has continued to affect the effectiveness in healthcare delivery. Sometimes, operations and surgeries are unnecessarily postponed due to non-availability and sometimes non-functionality of certain medical infrastructure in this hospital."

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