

Dispute over forced leave at Maltapost

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In January 2006, Maltapost, Malta's national postal service, became involved in an industrial dispute with the Union of United Workers when management decided to deduct a day from the annual leave entitlement of postal delivery workers who were told not to work due to inclement weather.

Maltapost, Malta's national postal service, was partially privatised in February 2002 and Transend Worldwide Ltd, a subsidiary of New Zealand Post, acquired a minority equity stake in Maltapost plc (MT0406101N ([//www.eurofound.europa.eu/ef/observatories/eurwork/articles/agreement-at-maltapost-after-industrial-action](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ef/observatories/eurwork/articles/agreement-at-maltapost-after-industrial-action))).

Maltapost employees in the delivery unit were instructed by management not to report for work on Monday 9 January 2006, due to heavy rain and bad weather. As not all the workers were informed early enough, some made it to work and were sent back home. Employees who live on Gozo were already on the ferry crossing to Malta. Subsequently, Maltapost management stated that a day would be deducted from the delivery employees' annual leave entitlement.

Although Maltapost stated that the reason it instructed its door-to-door employees not to report for work was the bad weather, the employees and their representatives, namely the Union of United Workers (Union Haddiema Maghqudin, UHM (<http://www.uhm.org.mt/>)) and the General Workers' Union (GWU (<http://www.gwu.org.mt/>)), argue otherwise. According to the latter, this action was taken as the workload on Mondays is much smaller than on other days. Affected employees argued that there were other days when the weather was worse and the management insisted that they still report for work. Hence, the company's decision was viewed as a measure to save costs. Furthermore, workers alleged that management wanted to use this occasion to support future decisions regarding changes in working times and days of work.

UHM, the union representing most Maltapost employees, registered an industrial dispute. The union stated that the decision taken by Maltapost is unacceptable as it goes against the employees' rights and affects the enterprise's clients. After two unsuccessful meetings involving the union, the Maltapost management and the public Director of Industrial Relations, UHM ordered industrial action to start on 17 January. All postal operators in hubs were instructed not to deliver any unaddressed post and registered letters until management reversed its decision. UHM's public sector secretary and shop stewards reported that the industrial action call was followed rigorously by all postal delivery workers, despite alleged intimidation from management. UHM warned

management that should further alleged attempts to intimidate the employees be made, it would step up the actions and extend the order to other sections of Maltapost employees, as a sign of solidarity with their colleagues.

Maltapost's chief executive officer denied any intimidation from management, saying that managers merely emphasised that the action was not in line with the collective agreement which states that the union is to give 48 hours' notice before resorting to industrial action. Management said that UHM had withdrawn the industrial action to allow further discussions. However after discussions ended in deadlock, the Director of Industrial Relations suggested taking the issue to the Industrial Tribunal. The union refused this suggestion while Maltapost agreed.

Meanwhile, GWU also expressed solidarity with the Maltapost delivery employees by writing to management seeking to overturn what it alleged to be an 'arbitrary decision'. The union stated that management should have given the employees concerned other work to do instead of sending them home.

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