

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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Strike action spreads in Greece

On June 22, striking bank workers in Greece extended their strike until June 24. The Federation of Bank Employees (OTOE) decided to renew its series of 48-hour strikes after three weeks of action against government plans to create an auxiliary pension fund and register bank employees with the state's main social security fund, the IKA.

On June 24, members of two of the largest union bodies in Greece are set to take strike action to protest government attacks on pension rights and planned social security changes. This week the General Confederation of Greek Labor (GSEE), the main trade union federation, called a nationwide general strike for June 24. The government is also seeking to extend the eight-hour working day, according to the GSEE.

The civil servants trade unionADEDY called a three-hour work stoppage for the same day. The main demonstration is to be held in front of the Finance Ministry in Athens.

Chemical workers in Belgium end strike

Chemical workers employed by BASF in Feluy, Belgium, ended their strike on June 17 following an agreement by company management to negotiate over job losses. Workers voted to give trade union representatives a mandate to enter into negotiations with BASF. Of the 300 workers employed at the plant near Brussels, 200 will lose their jobs, according to the *De Standaard* newspaper.

English Heritage staff strike over pay

Workers employed by English Heritage at tourist attractions across England took strike action on June 21 to demand a pay rise. Staff stopped worked for two hours following the imposition of a below-inflation pay award. The pay increase amounts to 1.5 percent, resulting in an increase in pay of just 50 pence a day on average.

Three hundred members of the PCS trade union and its sister union, Prospect, participated in the strike that closed or disrupted leading tourists attractions such as Stonehenge, Hadrian's Wall, Eltham Palace, Tintagel and Dover Castle. At some of these locations, managers were called upon to provide a skeleton service in an attempt to break the strike. Regional offices of English Heritage such as those in York, Swindon and Guildford as well as the headquarters in London were also disrupted by the action.

The unions have accused English Heritage of a failure to implement agreed improvements to the pay and grading structure.

Journalists in Coventry and Warwickshire, England strike in pay dispute

Journalists employed by newspapers in Coventry and Warwickshire, England began industrial action on June 17 in a pay dispute. The union said that 40 percent of its members voted in favour of a strike in Coventry. The members of the National Union of Journalists work on newspapers owned by Trinity Mirror, which include the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*. Trinity Mirror is seeking to impose a pay increase of 2.75 percent, leaving most workers earning below the average male wage in Coventry, according to the NUJ. A graduate trainee employed on weekly newspapers would start on £11,500, while fully qualified journalists with two years' experience would start on just £14,000.

A spokesman for Trinity Mirror said the strike did not affect production of its newspapers and that they would be published as usual.

Ugandan teachers strike over pay

Primary school teachers in Uganda have gone on strike to oppose a pay rise that is a small fraction of what they had been promised. The teachers had been promised they would earn at least sh200,000 (US\$116) per month after their scheduled pay rise—an increase of 54 percent on their current salary of sh130,000 (US\$75). When the increase came, however, it was

only sh10,000 (US\$5.78) per month, or 7.7 percent.

Many teachers spend a large proportion of their salary on rent and transport, with very little left to live on. The Kampala-based *New Vision* newspaper quoted a petition sent by the teachers to the speaker of parliament, Edward Sekandi:

“Although we stay at school from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., government has not bothered to cater for our lunch. It is advanced that we are paid a consolidated sum of sh130,000. In this event, we are forced to starve all day long, for five days a week, yet we have to teach and produce results.”

The petition also points out that the teachers cannot send their own children to school, since they cannot afford to pay school fees. Many teachers have to take second jobs in order to get enough money to live on.

Primary school teachers in the capital Kampala have been demonstrating to demand a living wage. Away from the capital, teachers in Kabarole District have been carrying out a sit-down strike.

The Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni, has also gone back on a written commitment given last year to increase the basic salary of university lecturers.

Striking hospital staff sacked by Tanzanian government

Medical interns at the Muhimbili National Hospital, Tanzania’s largest medical facility, have walked out on strike to demand an increase in their allowances. As of June 22, 111 doctors, 24 pharmacists and 13 nurses were involved in the strike.

The Tanzanian government has declared that those on strike have been sacked. Strikers have been ordered by the hospital’s management to move out of their dormitories. The hospital is in the centre of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania’s commercial capital, and has a capacity of 1,400 beds.

The interns are protesting that their allowances are inadequate and have demanded an increase of at least 20 percent.



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