

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

30 June 2006

Europe

UK postal workers to ballot on strike

Some 136,000 postal workers across Britain are to be balloted on strike action after pay negotiations broke down.

The postal union, the Communication Workers Union (CWU), took the decision after it failed to reach an agreement with the Royal Mail.

The union said the move followed the imposition of a 2.9 percent pay rise and the failure to reach a deal on plans to axe thousands of jobs.

The union said it would send ballot papers out to its members by July 10. Speaking on the BBC, the CWU deputy general secretary Dave Ward said the delay was intended to allow time to reach an agreement.

Teachers at UK girl's school go on strike

Teachers are beginning a three-day strike at Kesteven and Grantham Girls' School, Lincolnshire—the former school of former prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

It is the fourth time in two weeks that staff have taken action. Members of the National Association of Women Teachers (NASUWT) are opposing a staff restructuring plan and say the management has not consulted them properly about the proposals. They have been working to rule since March and stepped up their action as a result of threats of deductions to their salaries.

German doctors launch new wave of strikes

Doctors employed in local authority-run hospitals in three German states began indefinite strike action June 26 to press for wage increases and better working conditions.

It follows three months of industrial action by doctors at university hospitals which ended June 16.

Hospitals in the states of Hesse, Baden-Wurttemberg and Bavaria were affected and may cancel non-urgent operations, the Marburger Bund union said, adding that emergency cover would be available.

Marburger Bund, which represents around 70,000 doctors employed in around 700 local authority hospitals across Germany, is seeking a similar agreement to that reached by university doctors, who struck a deal under which they will see an average pay rise of around 16 percent.

Strike by Spanish supermarket workers enters fourth month

Workers at the logistics centre in Sant Sadurn d'Anoia, Barcelona of the Spanish Supermarket chain Mercadona are entering the fourth month of an indefinite strike.

The strike is organised by the CNT trade union. Mercadona, whose slogan translates as “supermarkets of trust,” is Spain's biggest national supermarket chain by sales, with 990 outlets across the country and 54,000 workers.

The present conflict came to a head when workers at the logistics

centre, located in a town 40 kilometres outside Barcelona, set up a CNT branch and began to organise for improved working conditions. Management's response was to refuse to recognise the CNT delegates, then to sack three union members.

On March 23 the CNT called a strike, initially for 10 days. When management refused to negotiate, the strike was declared indefinite. Pickets outside the centre have been attacked by private security, as well as the police. Individual strikers say they have received anonymous threats, including death threats, by telephone.

Mercadona also sent two men impersonating policemen to the house of one of the union representatives, where they threatened deportation as well as “grave and unknown consequences.”

A large proportion of the workers came out in the first few days, and management bussed in around 100 scabs to fill their places. As the strike has gone on, the numbers have been whittled down—there are now just 20 strikers.

The strikers are facing not just the company and the Catalan government, but also the UGT and CCOO trade unions lining up against them. (UGT representatives testified against sacked CNT strikers.)

Norwegian oil service workers strike following collapse of wage talks

Oil service workers organised in the Norwegian Oil and Petrochemical Workers Union (NOPEF) began strike action June 21 after wage talks with the Norwegian Oil Industry Association (OLF) collapsed earlier that morning. NOPEF had rejected an offer that would have given workers a raise of around NOK 55,000 (US\$6,110) over two years.

A union news release also demanded the same working conditions as other offshore oil workers, including shifts of two weeks offshore, followed by a four-week break.

The strike is expected to affect development well work and well maintenance, both of which are necessary to either maintain or increase production on reservoirs. Many in the field are experiencing declining output.

OLF spokesman Leif Harald Halvorsen said the industry still had an option to lock out all 2,600 oil service employees, but hadn't yet made a decision to exercise it: “The OLF will have to consider what to do next to make the strike come to an end.”

Industry experts said that if OLF called a lockout it would be trying to force government intervention. The government can force arbitration on parties in labour disputes if it threatens the “security or economic health” of the country or international markets.

Besides Statoil, Hydro and ConocoPhillips, a lockout would hit major oil operators such as ExxonMobil (XOM), Chevron (CVX) and Royal Dutch Shell (RDSA), all of which have drilling programs scheduled for 2006 and 2007.

The strike has already shut down operations on two oil rigs. Around 30 drilling operations may be affected next week if no settlement is reached.

Middle East

Bahrain airport strike narrowly averted

A potential strike that threatened to cripple Bahrain International Airport looked to have been averted on June 26.

Bahrain Airport Services (BAS) and the trade union are understood to have reached agreement on most of the issues on the table, avoiding a potential strike for now.

The meeting at the company, in Muharraq, was attended by the Labour Ministry and the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions and discussed the union's demands, including higher salaries, shift allowances, a savings scheme and others.

The board had been given the authority to call a strike on behalf of members following a petition signed by more than 1,000 employees.

The union is to hold its own meeting shortly to decide its next course of action.

Negotiations had mainly concerned low-grade workers, many of whom have salaries of less than BD200.

UAE workers protest over poor camp conditions

Around 1,000 labourers of Al Darwish Engineering company in Ajman, United Arab Emirates gathered outside their camps June 24 to protest against the shortage of water and poor living conditions at their camps in the Ajman Industrial area.

The workers gathered in an open area near their camp and tried to march towards the city, but the Ajman police prevented them from continuing towards the city.

Speaking to *Khaleej Times*, the workers said that they had come out to protest against the shortage of water.

"For the past five days the labourers had been suffering water shortage in the camp which reflects the poor living conditions there," said one worker.

One of the workers, Ali, said, "We work 10 hours a day so that we need water to take bath and to wash our clothes. For the past five days there was no water, how can we survive without it?"

An official from the public relations office of Al Darweesh Engineering explained that the company used to bring water to the workers' camps through pipes from Dubai, but water supply was disconnected due to a fault.

Africa

Workers at Namibian foam factory strike over pay and pensions

Workers at the Namibia Foam Factory have been out on strike since June 23 to demand that a 9 percent pay rise, agreed by management last year, is fully implemented and backdated.

According to the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation, the strikers are also claiming that deductions of 8.5 percent from their monthly salaries, intended as their pension contributions to the Old Mutual Insurance Company, are not being paid into their pension fund as their employer claims.

The strikers complain that the manager follows racist policies in the factory.

Strike in Niger to oppose increasing cost of living

A national one-day strike in Niger on June 22 brought the capital Niamey to a standstill.

The strike was in protest at the cost of living which has put the basic necessities of life, such as electricity and water, out of the reach of most Nigerians. They are demanding a decrease in the charges for electricity, water and telephones of between 30 and 50 percent.

The call by the governor of Niamey to its residents to ignore the strike call went unheeded. During the day, security forces patrolled the deserted streets.

According to the United Nations' Human Development Index, Niger is the poorest country in the world. The average life expectancy is just 44 years, and 86 percent of the adult population is illiterate.

South African catering workers strike over pay

Around 250 employees of Fedics Food Services in Port Elizabeth walked out on strike June 19 and were still on strike three days later. The workers belong to the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union (Saccawu). Nearly half of them work for the Boardwalk Casino.

The workers earn 700R per month (US\$95.70), and according to Saccawu they have to spend more than half their wages on transport to and from work.

Eastern Cape Herald reported that the strikers are demanding an 11 percent increase. Management has offered 4.5 percent (R33 or US\$4.50 a month). The strikers are also demanding an annual bonus of 100 percent, instead of the present bonus of 40 percent.

Saccawu organiser Mike Sikani told the paper that the union had resolved to go on strike after fruitless negotiation with Fedics management. He said that instead of negotiating in good faith, the company tried to undermine the strike by hiring scab labour.

The union has proposed to the government that the minimum wage for food and beverage workers be set at R1,200 (US\$164) a month.

One-week strike of Nigerian university lecturers

The National Executive Council of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has called a one-week strike of its members—from June 28 to July 5.

At a press conference held in Kano, northern Nigeria, the ASUU national president, Dr. Abdullahi Sule Kano, said that lecturers in all universities across the country have been directed to down tools, "no teaching, no statutory meetings, no examinations, no committee meetings and no project supervision."

He said that government has persistently failed to honour its agreement to set up a team to re-negotiate the 2001 agreement with ASUU despite the intervention of the Committee of Pro-Chancellors (CPC).

The government had also refused to reinstate 49 unjustly sacked lecturers of university of Ilorin, he said, despite a court order.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact