

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

17 April 2009

The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

France: Staff strike shuts down Eiffel Tower

The Eiffel Tower was closed down April 8 after staff went on strike to demand better working conditions and security. Around 300 workers completely blocked the tower—one of the largest tourist attractions in the world—on April 8. The action continued into a second day.

France: Fishermen lift blockade of northern ports

At going to press, French fishermen had lifted their blockade at the ports of Calais, Dunkirk and Boulogne.

The fishermen began their blockade of the three ports April 14 to protest European Union fishing quotas, which they say threaten their livelihoods.

The fishing flotillas forced a halt to all cross-Channel traffic, including passenger ferries and freighters, with long traffic queues forming in both France and the UK.

The French government has rejected demands to renegotiate the quotas. Meetings were ongoing and there could be a resumption of the industrial action.

Bulgaria: Steelworkers protests continue over plant closures

Workers at the Kremikovtzi steel plant are continuing their protests demanding the Bulgarian government support the factory against closure.

The workers have held protest rallies to demand the government intervene and that it pay out arrears in wages—outstanding from November—as well as provide compensation to 2,000 workers who are to lose their jobs by the end of June.

England: Teachers threaten strike action over funding

Delegates at the National Union of Teachers conference in Cardiff this week threatened industrial action over funding cuts to sixth-form colleges and job-training courses.

The cuts arise from a mistake in the numbers applying for places. Teachers estimate the deficit could amount to as much as 4 percent, and that colleges are considering laying off staff and increasing class sizes to cope with the reduction.

Egypt: Doctors' protest closes clinics

On April 9, 19 private clinics in Cairo and Helwan closed down in protest against low wages.

The Doctors' Syndicate called on private clinics to join a series of protests against doctors' low salaries and the government's delay in paying doctors their promised raises.

It is the third protest that the Doctors' Syndicate has organised this month.

Also in Egypt, staff at the Workers University in

Assiut went on strike April 8 in protest at cuts in incentives and compensations during the past nine months, according to *Al Youm Al Sab3*.

Thousands of South African domestic appliance workers strike over job cuts

Members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) at Defy Appliances are on indefinite strike to protest the “unjust” retrenchment of their colleagues. Numsa has around 4,000 members at the company.

Defy Appliances is the largest manufacturer and distributor of major domestic appliances in southern Africa. From 2006 to 2007, its annual turnover was more than R2.3 billion (US\$255 million), with a 40 percent share of the market for major household electrical appliances. It is carrying out a “restructuring process” resulting from the global financial crisis.

Numsa said it was angry that management had considered for retrenchment only those workers who had completed just two years with the company, and that those losing their jobs were to receive a “paltry” two weeks’ pay for each year completed.

Union calls off South African transport workers strike

The nationwide strike by four South African transport unions, begun on April 7, has been called off after unions claimed they have won 80 percent of their demands. It was reported that the strike was beginning to affect deliveries of food supplies.

Deputy president of the South African Transport & Allied Workers’ Union (Satawu), June Dube, called off the strike, saying that 95 percent of Satawu members were in line to benefit from the negotiated settlement. In a two-year deal, the minimum wage for ultra-heavy long-distance drivers would increase to R6,000 a month from R4,300, while general workers’ salaries would rise to a minimum of R3,000 from R2,500 (US\$1=R9).

Nigerian medical staff on two-day strike

Nigerian medical staff in Edo State went on a two-day warning strike on April 14 to oppose new taxes being imposed on private health institutions by the state government. The strike began after the expiry of a 21-day ultimatum period.

The Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) noted that the new tax rate had worsened the already poor morbidity indices in the state and had led to the loss of highly skilled medical and dental practitioners.



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