

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

15 May 2009

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

Germany: Steelworkers protest against job insecurity

Around 15,000 workers protested May 11 against plans by ThyssenKrupp AG, Germany's largest steel maker, to cut up to 2,000 jobs at its seven plants by 2011.

Steelworkers drove through the city of Duisburg in a convoy of 300 cars. About 1,500 workers protested at the Nordseewerke wharf in Emden. Another 1,000 demonstrated at HDW shipbuilders in Kiel. About 3,000 workers held a vigil at the company's steel works in Bochum. Thousands more were gathered at other ThyssenKrupp sites across the country.

Workers are demanding job security and the continuation of participation in decision-making. The Dusseldorf-based company said last week that the planned cuts were brought on by the economic slump.

German steel production has recorded its worst slump since 1949. The Federal Statistics Office in Wiesbaden announced that production in the steel industry is down by more than 50 percent.

Nationwide, iron ore is only being produced at nine of the 15 German blast furnaces, and they have been operating at 50 percent of capacity. As a result, 45,000 of the 94,000 people employed by the country's steel industry are currently working reduced hours.

France: Strikes at universities

Staff and students at almost a quarter of France's state-run universities remain on strike over government plans to overhaul the higher education system.

According to the BBC, students and lecturers at around 20 of France's 83 state-run universities are still on strike this week. The protests are now in their 14th week.

The protests may mean that some pupils, who have missed out on months of teaching, will have to miss their exams and repeat an entire academic year or be passed without taking an exam.

Last month, statistics students from the technical college in the southern town of Avignon took their final exam in a local branch of a McDonald's restaurant, because their faculty had been shut by the protests.

The dispute was originally provoked by plans to change the status of academic researchers and to give university presidents more power. But it has since escalated into a more general dispute over President Nicolas Sarkozy's plans to overhaul the higher education system and privatise

parts of it.

Germany: Strike by childcare workers expected

Child care workers are expected to strike nationwide on May 15 in an ongoing wage dispute.

The child care, or Kita workers, are struggling for a wage increase and better healthcare benefits. Around 19,000 Kita staff walked off the job last week during a temporary strike.

Public workers' union Verdi head, Frank Bsirske, told the Hanover daily Neue Presse, "I expect very strong backing. Money and endurance for the workers' fight will last a very, very long time."

UK: Postal workers threaten June strike over job cuts

Personneltoday.com reported on May 12 that the postal workers' union has said that 16,000 Royal Mail staff in London are likely to strike next month.

The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) said staff at 159 depots across London—including delivery offices, sorting offices and distribution hubs—will vote on industrial action over the next two weeks.

The announcement coincided with news that the government intends to push ahead with its plans to part-privatise Royal Mail, selling off up to 30 percent to corporate interests.

Germany: Airline workers strike

Around 100 airline security workers staged an unannounced strike on May 11 in Düsseldorf, reported thelocal.de. The workers are demanding an increase in wages for some 22,000 security workers in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. According to two-year labour contracts, employers offer an hourly pay raise of €0.13 for 2009 and €0.11 for 2010. The lowest hourly rate for these workers is €7.53, and the highest is only €12.38. The union Verdi also called on workers at the Solvay chemical plant in Rheinberg to strike.

Ireland: Nurses to stage one-day strike

Nurses at Sligo General Hospital have taken the decision to stage a one-day strike on May 21 in a dispute over the non-renewal of temporary contracts and bed closures.

Last week there was an almost unanimous vote by Irish Nurses Organisation (INO) members in favour of industrial action.

Italy: Fiat workers in short strike

According to a Reuters report, workers at Fiat SpA's Termini Imerese plant in Sicily went on a brief strike Monday to pressure the car maker to disclose its plans for them in the event of a merger with General Motors Europe.

The strike was called by three unions, the Fiom-CGIL, Fim and Uilm, and half the morning shift took up the call as well as some sub-contractors, Roberto Mastrosimone, local head of the Fiom-CGIL, said.

The Termini Imerese plant, which employs 1,700 people, was to resume full production Monday after the Fiat workers had been laid off for two weeks.

Mastrosimone said they had been on part-time working for five of the last eight months, and they were protesting against the possible closure of their plant.

Fiat could close sites in Germany, Italy, the UK and Austria if it took over GM Europe and its largest component, Opel. On May 16, Italy's unions are organising a protest march in Turin, where Fiat is based.

Israel: Schools shut, services halted by industrial action

On May 13, industrial action by workers in the Union of Local Authorities in Israel (ULAI) shut down all schools and municipal kindergartens, in protest against the Ministry of Finance's proposed cuts in the education system and aid to local authorities. The ULAI originally planned a two-hour strike, but expanded it to the whole day.

According to Globe-Online.com, the strike also halted street cleaning, garbage pick-up, issuing of parking tickets, and reception of the public at municipal offices.

The group of large municipalities called the Forum of 15, which includes Tel Aviv-Jaffa and Haifa, decided to keep to the original two-hour strike, and schools and kindergartens opened at 10 a.m.

The ULAI said that high school matriculation exams (bagrut) would go ahead on schedule.

Globe-Online.com said that on May 12, "some mayors demonstrated opposite the prime minister's office. The demonstration turned violent, with verbal and physical confrontations between the mayors and police and border police who were called to the scene."

Egypt: Textile workers transferred as punishment for strike

A May 5 report in scandegypt.blogspot.com said that workers at the Indorama textile factory were on strike since 11 a.m. that day after four of their colleagues were "transferred to the company branch in Alexandria probably as a punishment after the previous 11-day strike that ended with a victory for the workers on March 16". The strike began after talks between the local union and the management broke down.

Nigerian doctor in coma after police beating

A striking doctor at Surulere General Hospital in Lagos State is in a coma after being beaten by police trying to stop the doctors from picketing.

The Vanguard newspaper noted that "it took the spirited effort of his colleagues to rescue him from the angry policemen deployed to the hospital to prevent the strike".

The strike, called by the Medical Guild, affected all Lagos State hospitals. A 24-hour ultimatum to end the strike issued by State Commissioner for Health Dr. Jide Idris had the opposite effect when the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) also joined the strike starting from May 11. The state government later promised to address the issues behind the strike and offered an improved welfare package, leading to a suspension of the strike.

Medical staff at the Ebonyi State University Teaching Hospital face similar threats of dismissal.

Striking steelworkers facing dismissal in Ghana

More than 600 striking workers at Western Steel and Forging Limited in Kpone, near Tema, in Ghana, are facing dismissal after their strike was branded illegal. The strike began on May 6, after which the workers faced a lockout by management.

The workers had staged a demonstration inside the factory to demand the dismissal of Kyeremeh Kofi Awuah, the human resources manager. They accuse Awuah of ignoring their welfare, including accidents, and of cancelling their salary payments.

Battery workers on strike in South Africa

Around 300 workers at Willard Batteries in South Africa went out on strike on May 11 to oppose the company's plan to downsize, with the loss of 99 workers.

National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa spokesman Andile Zitho said the strike would continue until the company replaced forced retrenchments with a voluntary severance scheme.



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