Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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

Germany: Bank workers protest

Plans by European bank workers to demonstrate in front of the headquarters of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt April 18, to call for a "radical change in the sales practices of financial service providers", were reported by uniglobalunion.org.

"UNI Finance Global Union, German union ver.di, bank workers and representatives of finance unions in Europe are in Frankfurt as part of the global action week organised for bank workers to share their stories of unscrupulous sales pressure from banks.

Under the motto 'Fair Banking Advice? Fair Working Conditions? Now!' finance workers across the globe will join the push to change what is a global problem for bank workers," said the web site.

Similar actions have been arranged in other countries, including France, Iceland and Australia.

Head of UNI Finance Oliver Roethig said, "An HSBC bank worker from Latin America reported she had to work from her hospital bed to bring in half a million US$ in a week to reach sales targets and save her chance of promotion. Banks cannot continue to make profits through these practices; it's immoral."

The web site said bank workers in Europe and around the world have talked of the extreme pressures they feel to meet sales goals and to push certain types of financial products on customers who don't necessarily need them.

Ireland: Kingspan workers to strike

Memers of the SIPTU trade union at Kingspan Ltd in Kingscourt, county Cavan, are to begin industrial action from April 30. The strike follows a decision by the company to lock out SIPTU members from that date in its attempts to enforce wage cuts and significantly reduce conditions of employment at the Kingscourt plant.

The company has sought to impose an 11 percent reduction in rates of pay for production staff, to reduce shift allowances, overtime rates and bonuses and to impose a 33 percent reduction in the rates of pay for new starters.

According to SIPTU Divisional Organiser Gerry McCormack, the union is willing to eliminate the marginal cost differential that exists between the operations at Kingscourt and a steel panel manufacturing plant in Wales that the company cites for reducing costs.

Spain: Strike action hits "bullet trains"

A strike by train porters on the "bullet train" AVEs at the weekend will see a series of daily stoppages. The porters say their jobs are under threat from management.

The CGT union says that their members will continue the action until June 30, and will stop work for four hours on weekdays except Saturdays, and for eight hours on Fridays and Sundays.

UK: College strike

According to the University and College Union (UCU) web site, members of UCU at Northumberland College announced April 21 that they will be taking a day's strike action next week in a dispute over job losses, pay cuts and increased working hours.

There will be staff on picket lines at all main entrances to the college and a protest outside Ashington station.

The college has said it will make 67 academic staff redundant and increase the working hours of those who remain, resulting in a pay cut for all lecturing staff. According to recent figures, the college is already spending below average on mainstream staff, but has more than doubled the size of the senior management team in four years.

Those who manage to keep their jobs will see their teaching hours increase from 825 to 900, with a rise in preparation time and marking as well. There will also be a large reduction in how much staff can earn, with the top grade for lecturers dropping from £37,000 to £27,000.

A presentation to the college by the union showed that:

• Northumberland College's senior management team (SMT) of ten is more than twice the sector average. The college should only have four members of SMT based on the sector average of one member for every 926 learners.

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• Salary costs for the senior management team have increased by 94 percent in two years.
• Teaching staff costs at Northumberland are currently £30,033, compared to a sector average of £35,059.
• The sector average for teaching hours for a member of staff is 827. Northumberland College is proposing to increase staff teaching hours from 827 to 900.

Northumberland College is the only general further education college in the county. At the beginning of April over 90 percent of UCU members who voted supported strike action and 99.19 percent agreed to action short of a strike.

Egypt: Workers resume protests

Daily News Egypt reported April 20 that workers from two companies have resumed sit-ins near parliament, after they say the government and their employers "failed to honour agreements aimed at resolving their grievances."

Workers from the Tanta Flax and Oils Company resumed their sit-in in front of Cairo's cabinet building April 19, two months after an agreement was reached between the Manpower Ministry and the company's management.

Hisham El-Okal, one of around a hundred Tanta workers protesting outside cabinet said, "We ended the sit-in after an agreement that we would receive this sum. Two months later and the agreement hasn't been honoured.

"We're here to demand that the minister either honours the agreement or rips up the sale contract between the government and the investor, because he's refusing to either give us our money or operate the factory."

Saudi investor Abdellah El-Kahky purchased the privatized company in 2006. Workers say that pay and conditions have deteriorated to such an extent since the takeover that when the workforce was offered an early retirement sum after the 15-day sit-in in February, virtually all workers accepted the offer.

An agreement was reached that workers who have been with the company for more than 20 years will receive a sum of LE 40,000.

Also, around 100 workers from 10th Ramadan City's Salemco Spinning and Weaving Company are camped on Qasr El-Aini Street, near parliament, having also resumed a sit-in this week after an agreement reached in March about unpaid financial entitlements was not honoured.

The workers broke up their last sit-in on March 14, on the basis that they would be paid the salaries owed to them for January, February and March. An agreement was reached between the Ministry and Salemco owner Mohamed Fariz Salem that the Ministry would assume responsibility for some of the outstanding funds and pay the basic salaries of LE 200, and that Salem would pay the rest.

According to a statement issued by the Centre for Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS), Salem is refusing to pay a LE 150 incentive payment, an annual raise as well as a Labour Day bonus payment.

One worker, Abdel-Sadeq El-Awwad said, "Hopefully this time we won't leave here until we've secured our rights and not just been given false decisions by the manpower minister."

El-Awwad told *Daily News Egypt* that workers have staged regular industrial action since 2005. One of the company's two factories was closed in 2007 and he says that the second is empty of raw materials and has not been operating since January.

Salemco and Tanta were two of five groups of workers protesting around parliament, who issued a joint statement April 19.

"We've been burnt by false promises, decisions and agreements. We have all suffered from the language of procrastination by the government and its officials. We suspended our protests on the basis of promises, decisions and agreements which the government didn't uphold," the statement read.

The statement makes four demands, including a minimum wage of LE 1,200.

South Africa: Municipal workers end strike

On Wednesday 21 April, the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) called off its strike action. The action began on April 12 and involved around 130,000 municipal workers across the country.

The strike halted many activities carried out by local authorities such as rubbish collection. Their demands were addressed to the local authorities' parent body, the South African Local Government Association. They included two years accrual of pay arrears and a job evaluation to bring low and middle income workers' pay to the market level. They were also calling for the pay of senior local authority officials to be reduced, as they currently earn above the market rate.

According to a Reuters report of 21 April, Walter Theledi, a SAMWU official confirmed that the strike had been called off, but gave no details of any settlement saying they would be disclosed later.

South Africa: Striking gold miners continue their action

Around 800 miners at the Gold One's prestige gold mine at Modder East have been on strike for a month. The miners who are members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) struck after talks over living allowances and the length of the new wage contract could not be agreed.

According to a *Business Day* article of April 20, the strike so far has meant the loss of about 2,000 ounces of gold production. The current world price of gold is around US$ 1,100 an ounce. NUM spokesman Lesiba Seshoka told *Business Day* that although formal discussions with the company were taking place that day he did not expect an immediate end to the strike.

Nigeria: Judiciary workers set to strike

Judiciary workers belonging to the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN), in the South Western Nigerian state of Ekiti, were due to begin indefinite strike action Monday April 19. Their strike follows the failure of the state government to implement the federally agreed Consolidated Judiciary Salary Structure (CONJUSS).

A previous strike in December last year failed to get the state government to honour the agreement. A seven-man committee had been set up in December 2009, headed by the state's Chief Judge to look at the union's demands. They had made recommendations in line with the union's view but the state government had failed to implement them.

The state judiciary worker's actions were supported by the national executive of the union, which had called on its members in any states that had not implemented CONJUSS to take action.

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Nigeria: NUPENG members announce forthcoming strike

Members of the National Union of Petroleum and Gas Workers (NUPENG) in Lagos and six other South Western states of Nigeria have declared their intention to take indefinite strike action. The union accuses Shell Petroleum Development Company of using casual labour and not honouring a Memorandum of Understanding in respect to contract workers used by Shell. The union is calling on Shell to pay benefits of workers laid off in 2008 and 2009.

The union issued a seven-day ultimatum that expired yesterday. Lagos NUPENG chairman, Alhaji Tokunbo Korodo, has informed the Lagos State Controller of Labour of the union's proposed action. Amongst the NUPENG workers expected to take action are tanker drivers, and this could quickly lead to fuel shortages.

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