

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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

Cammell Laird shipyard workers strike Merseyside

Around 100 workers at the Cammell Laird shipyard in Birkenhead, Merseyside, England took unofficial strike action May 17. They were protesting plans by the company to sack 180 workers.

The Unite and GMB trade unions are currently involved in talks with management at the yard regarding the planned redundancies. Cammell Laird employs almost 700 full-time staff, as well as a similar number of subcontractors. The company said that the job losses were necessary due to a long-term postponement of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary supply ship Fort George's scheduled eight-month refit.

According to the *Liverpool Echo*, the chief executive of the firm, John Syvret, said that the union had already suggested "laying off staff for three weeks or by advancing holidays when the contract loss amounted to eight months."

Finnish health care staff continue overtime ban

Health care workers in Finland, members of the Union of Health and Social Care Professionals, continued their ban on overtime and shift changes this week. They are involved in a dispute over better pay and conditions.

According to YLE Radio the overtime ban will cover a further six new hospital districts and cities from Thursday. These are Kuopio, Pori, Vaasa, Seinäjoki, Jyväskylä and Rovaniemi. There are 49,000 workers involved in the overtime ban. The union and management are set to hold further talks today.

Norwegian transport workers and cleaners continue strike

On Tuesday 800 members of the Norwegian Transport Workers' Union joined an ongoing strike to protest low pay for temporary

staff and to demand a minimum wage guarantee.

The number of workers involved in the stoppage rose to 2,500 after 1,050 additional cleaning personnel joined the action. The strike began the previous Thursday with a walkout by workers at a goods terminal in Oslo.

The stoppage has affected the operation of a number of firms in Norway including DHL Express, Tollpost Globe, Nor Lines and Bring. According to the union parts of the fishing industry could also be affected by the dispute.

Romanian teachers to strike from May 31

Teachers in Romania are set to begin an indefinite strike over pay on May 31. The action would involve around 350,000 workers.

According to Marius Petcu, the leader of the CNSLR Fratia trade union, the strike will be followed by further "warning and solidarity strikes" involving transport workers, railwaymen, civil clerks and nurses.

Petcu also reported that unions planned to hold a general strike next month and were "seeking to boost pressure on the government ... All our efforts to maintain constructively a social dialogue with this government have failed. This is not possible with the current cabinet".

He added, "We aim to gather around one million people in a general strike across Romania the day parliament discusses the IMF-backed measures".

Early next month the government of Prime Minister Emil Boc proposes to hold a confidence vote on austerity measures, including wage and pension cuts, as agreed under a €20 billion IMF-led aid deal. The austerity measures will cut public sector employees' pay by 25 percent and pensions by 15 percent. The public sector employs 1.3 million workers and accounts for a third of all jobs.

Ground staff strike at Berlin airports

On Thursday morning ground staff at Berlin's two international airports, Tegel and Schoenefeld, struck in pursuit of higher wages. The strike was called by the Verdi union, which represents some of the ground staff.

About 250 ground crew took part in the six-hour strike over wages. Airlines hit by the action included Germany's biggest airline, Lufthansa. According to Verdi at least 11 flights were cancelled at Schoenefeld airport

The stoppage went ahead following the breakdown in a fifth round of talks between trade unions representing ground staff and their employers, GlobeGround Berlin, Ground Service International and Acciona.

SATAWU continues strike action in South African transport dispute

Workers at the state-owned logistics company Transnet and the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) belonging to the United Transport and Allied Union accepted wage rises of 11 percent and 10 percent respectively last week and have returned to work.

Members of the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union, however, are continuing their strike. A Reuters report of May 26 also claims SATAWU union leaders representing the Transnet workers were set to sign an agreement yesterday, which will be put to a vote by union members.

Business interests in South Africa are becoming increasingly concerned at the effects of the strike and have called on the government to intervene. Business Unity SA estimates the Transnet strike and related actions have cost R7 billion (US\$900 million). There is fear of wider strike action. A strike by National Union of Mineworkers members working for the power utility Eskom was prevented when the company won a court interdict on the grounds it provides an essential service.

The government is under pressure because of the world football cup tournament due to start in two weeks. Last Friday, COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vivi explained, "We have been contacted by the ANC who raised concern that the strike might undermine the success of the World Cup."

The Petroleum Industry Association has said the ongoing strike could affect fuel supplies.

South Africa: Netcare workers set to strike

Members of the Health and other Service Personnel Trade Union of South Africa (HOSPERSA) working for South Africa's largest private hospital service, Netcare, were due to begin strike action May 26. The union is seeking a 12 percent wage increase and has rejected the company offer of 8.25 percent.

South African pharmacy workers set to strike

Members of the South Africa Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) working for Dis-Chem pharmacies were due to begin strike action May 27. The action will affect more than 40 Dis-Chem stores. The workers are seeking a 15 percent pay increase, a minimum wage of R3500 (US\$450), amongst other demands. The union had to undertake a prolonged struggle with the company for recognition.

Doctors in Nigeria give strike notice

Doctors belonging to the National Association of Resident Doctors of Nigeria, NARD, are set to take three days of strike action beginning June 1. They are calling on the Federal and State governments to implement the Consolidated Medical Salary Structures, CONMESS, and for payments of arrears that have accrued since January of this year.

Oil workers threaten strike as Shell prepares to leave Ghana

Shell is planning to divest its interests in Ghana and 20 other African countries. Staff belonging to the Shell Senior and Supervisory Staff Association (SSSSA) are concerned that Shell is planning to sell the company as a going concern and transfer the plant and workforce to whoever buys the company.

SSSSA has presented a petition to the company asking it to "respectfully and properly sever its legal relationship with its employees."

SSSSA says it wants the right to be able to choose their employer. Amongst other demands is for the full balance of the pension scheme to be passed to the employees prior to the sale and for all outstanding leave to be commuted to cash payments.

Workers are concerned at the outcome of sales of Shell's interests in Cameroon and the Gambia, which they say were not to their advantage. The Shell workers say they will take strike action next week if their demands are not addressed.



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