

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

2 July 2010

Italian workers in general strike over austerity measures

Tens of thousands of protestors took part in rallies held in Rome, Milan, Bologna and other major cities across the country on June 25. The protests were called in opposition to public spending cuts that form part of the austerity measures being implemented by the government of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

The government austerity package is worth 24 billion euros (£20 billion; \$29 billion) and covers the years 2011-2012.

Private sector and public transport employees affiliated to the Italian General Confederation of Labour union struck for four hours, while others in the public sector staged a day-long strike.

Some disruption to transport links was reported, with some flights cancelled in Rome, and underground services affected in Rome and Naples.

Ireland: Nurses protest over pay cuts

Around 800 nurses working for the country's largest private healthcare provider staged lunchtime protests June 30 at four hospitals against unilateral pay cuts.

Nurses organised in the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO), at the four Bon Secours hospitals in Cork, Dublin, Galway and Tralee, say their employer reneged on a Labour Relations Commission agreement, brokered in February, to restore to nurses a 5 percent cut deducted from their January pay. Following an ongoing dispute, the Bon Secours eventually deferred the first deduction until June 25, at which point 10 percent was deducted (5 percent for May and 5 percent for June). The INMO said the deduction was illegal given the nurses had balloted to reject it.

According to the *Irish Examiner*, a statement from the Bon Secours Health System said the cuts were necessary to "ensure the viability of the group and the sustainability of jobs" in the face of cuts in reimbursement rates imposed by private health insurers on January 1.

Staff at Cadbury Sixth Form College in Birmingham, England, strike to protest restructuring

Staff at Cadbury Sixth Form College in Birmingham struck on June 24 and June 29 to protest management plans to change salary arrangements and increase workloads.

Some 70 staff are involved in the action and are members of the NUT, ATL and NASUWT trade unions. The college has about 1,400 students at the site.

David Room, of the National Union of Teachers, said the union and staff had not been properly consulted over the changes. "Teachers feel the proposals are unworkable and are going to have a massively detrimental effect on the students' education", he said.

Ireland: Leitrim County Council workers strike

General services staff at Leitrim County Council struck on June 25 over a decision taken by the local authority to replace cleaning staff with private contractors. A series of meetings between SIPTU union and the council failed to resolve the ongoing dispute.

The SIPTU Branch Organiser with the union's County Council branch, Raymond O'Reilly, said they have put forward a number of alternatives to the local authority but it has not given any commitment to change the decision. He said it was a "point of principle" at this stage.

On July 1, a further day of strike action scheduled for the following day was called off after the Labour Relations Commission and council agreed to hold further talks with SIPTU.

Casino workers strike in Finland

Casino workers organised in the Finnish Slot Machine Association (RAY) are planning a 48-hour strike on July 2-4, over planned adverse changes to wages and conditions. The proposed industrial action would probably result in closed casinos over the weekend.

The RAY said that a strike would lead to a loss of hundreds of thousands of euros for casinos.

UK: Staff at the BBC say strike likely after pension proposals

Staff at the BBC, organised in the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), Bectu and Unite unions, have threatened strike action after an agreement on pay and pensions failed to be reached June 30.

For their part, the NUJ accused the BBC of a "pensions robbery" and an "unacceptable" pay cut in the proposed pension changes. The proposals follow a three-month consultation to tackle the BBC's reported £2 billion pound deficit. According to the corporation, the proposals include closing the staff final salary scheme to newcomers and capping the growth of pensionable salaries of existing members to one percent.

The offer to staff now stands at a flat rate increase of £475 for staff paid up to £37,726 a year. Those paid above the BBC-defined cap face a pay freeze.

Around 30 percent of journalists at the BBC membership would see no increase in earnings given the core offer on pay.

There is widespread feeling amongst the workforce that the BBC should pay staff across the board more, given the 2 percent increase in its public licence fee. The proposal on the table would increase the pay bill by 1 percent.

In a statement on its website, the BBC says that the proposed changes will now go into a consultation period of 90 days, terminating September 30.

Egyptian textile workers strike in dispute over retirement payments

Textile workers employed at the Amonsito company in Egypt began indefinite industrial action this week in an ongoing dispute over retirement benefits. The company is currently being liquidated by Banque Misr, the company's creditor, and the workers are demanding promised compensation payments.

Workers at the factory have criticised Egyptian Minister of Manpower and Migration Aisha Abdel Hadi for allowing Misr to pay workers LE50 million, and not the LE106 million agreed earlier this year.

The original agreement stipulated that employees with more than 20 years of service receive three months worth of their regular salary for each year they have worked. Those who had been employed less than 20 years were to receive the equivalent of four months pay per year.

Israeli diplomats pay dispute continues

In a dispute over pay and conditions, diplomats have started wearing jeans and sandals to work, foreign ministry officials have said.

Diplomatic staff are demanding wages on par with their colleagues at the defence and intelligence agencies. According to the BBC, the strike could disrupt Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's forthcoming trip to the US.

The workers' pay committee has urged employees at Israel's Washington embassy not to make arrangements for his visit in July, local reports say.

According to the committee, foreign ministry staff are paid half of what defence ministry staff and members of the intelligence community who serve abroad receive, for the same amount of work.

The dispute—now entering its sixth month—is becoming increasingly public, said the BBC.

Several employees of the foreign ministry have abandoned the normal suit-and-tie dress code, and were coming to work in jeans and sandals, an official told the BBC on condition of anonymity.

The partial strike has also extended to the foreign ministry's visitors' department, which is in charge of rolling out the red carpet for foreign dignitaries, the official said.

On June 28, Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon was forced to welcome visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov without the customary ceremony because no one had organised one, the AFP reported.

Banking workers strike in Niger

Bank workers belonging to the SYMBANK union held a two-day strike over pay and better working conditions beginning Tuesday. According to the union's general secretary, Issoufou Chaibou, the action was supported in the capital Niamey and throughout the country.

The employers made no move to open negotiations with the union, and Chaibou said the action would continue until their demands were met.

Trade unionists sacked at soft drink plant in Sierra Leone

Twenty-nine workers at a soft drink bottling facility belonging to King's Production Industry have been sacked. Since late 2009, the Hotel, Food, Drinks, Entertainment and Tobacco Workers Union had been trying to organise the workers, and 113 had signed up to join. Management refused to deduct the union dues from the members even after the union appealed to the Ministry of Labour.

Recently the company announced redundancies. Firstly three, then 19 and now 29 redundancies have been carried through. All the 29 made redundant are union members.

Teachers in Zambian capital plan strike over pay

Teachers in Kasama, the capital of the Northern Province of Zambia, have agreed to take strike action if their June salaries are not paid on time at the end of the month.

The teachers, members of the Secondary School Teachers Union of Zambia (SESTUZ), the basic Education Teachers Union of Zambia (BETUZ) and the Zambian National Union of Teachers (ZNUT) met last weekend to discuss the dispute.

The teachers demanded the government take action to prevent regular delays in the payment of their salaries, which have brought hardship to them and their families. In addition to strike action, the teachers vowed to picket the office of the permanent secretary if delays in payment continued.

Nigerian doctors continue strike action

Strike action begun last week by resident doctors belonging to the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) continues. Their demands include the implementation of the consolidated medical salary structure (CONMESS), infrastructure improvements and payment of arrears.

Hospital authorities in the capital, Abuja, have had to bring in National Youth Service Corps doctors at the National hospital because of the impact of the resident doctors' action.

Resident doctors on strike at Kano teaching hospital have accused management of threatening to sack striking doctors. Management have denied this.

Nigerian delta polytechnic staff take action

Staff belonging to the Senior Staff Union of Colleges of Education Nigeria (SSUCOEN), the Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Polytechnics (SSANIP) and the Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions (NASU) in Delta State, began strike action at the end of last week.

Amongst their demands are the implementation of the nationally agreed Consolidated Tertiary Educational Institutions Salary Structure (CONTEDESS), and payment of arrears.



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