

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

20 May 2011

Pilots at Aer Lingus ballot for industrial action

Pilots at the national carrier Aer Lingus are balloting for industrial action, including a withdrawal of service, in a dispute over work rosters.

The ballot by the Irish Airline Pilots' Association will not be completed until May 27. The ballot paper said that they will engage in industrial action if Aer Lingus management fails to address pilot grievances over rosters on both the A320 and A330 fleets by June 7.

Sources have said that there is currently a serious shortage of pilots, as too many had been allowed to leave the airline. Pilots were being forced to work rosters that were excessively harsh while the airline is hiring pilots on a contract basis.

Doncaster council workers balloted for strike over cuts to services, jobs

Employees at Labour-controlled Doncaster Council are to be balloted for industrial action over cuts to jobs and services.

The Unison union said 700 jobs had been lost since Christmas, with about another 500 to be cut over the coming year.

The council authority said it was "inevitable" some of the cuts would "affect both staff and residents directly."

A spokesperson for Doncaster Council confirmed that it had to save £71 million by 2015, and said "employees know we are in a difficult position."

Initial cuts target a warden service for elderly residents, home care services and will mean closures of libraries.

Finnish paper workers' dispute continues in face of strikebreaking efforts

A fierce two-month-old dispute over pay and conditions in Finland's pulp and paper industry continues.

The union Ammattiliitto Pro called for further strikes last week in belated response to strikebreaking and illegal coercion by industry management.

As of May 13, around 75 percent of 4,000 white-collar, technical, and clerical workers in the paper sector were on strike. Strikes have been extended at UPM, the Metsäliitto companies (Metsä-Botnia, M-real, Metsä Tissue), and Stora Enso and its contracting company Efora. A strike by Sappi workers at the Kirkniemi mill in southern Finland started a day

early due to management moves to break it.

As a result of redundancies across the pulp and paper industry, the reduced workforce has been expected to pick up the slack. Employers have used threats, bullying tactics, and abuse to break the strike. At Sappi Kirkniemi prior to the recent walkout, workers were pressured to train summer job workers, believed to be a potential scab workforce.

Egyptian doctors in open-ended national strike for better health service

On May 17, doctors nationwide started an open-ended strike until their demands are met.

Initial reports said that the first day was as successful as last week's one-day strike, despite attempts to undermine it. The response rate was estimated at between 85 to 90 percent as 227 hospitals across the country participated. Between 60 and 75 percent of hospitals in Cairo reportedly participated.

Red Sea and North Sinai governorates joined the strike for the first time, while Upper Egypt governorates witnessed the participation of central hospitals for the first time, according to *Daily News Egypt*.

Dentists, pharmacists and nursing staff members also joined the strike.

Doctors are demanding the dismissal of Minister of Health Ashraf Hatem, an increase in the health budget from 3.5 percent to 15 percent of the national budget, increased wages, and the provision of adequate security at hospitals.

"We started the open-ended strike to pressure the government and to attract media attention in order to get any response from officials," said Ayman Shawky, a doctor at the Ahmed Maher Public Hospital.

"The heads of departments tried to operate clinics on their own but failed because we were all on strike."

Dr. Muhammad Shafiq, a committee member, told *Al Masry Al Youm* that the Ministry of Health was pressuring doctors to end the strike. The ministry was "sending untrue faxes in which it claims it responded to the demands, and that it has forced hospital administrations to work."

Doctors were threatened with referral to the legal affairs directorate at their hospitals and some were threatened with suspension of up to six months by the official syndicate/union and the Ministry of Health, according to organizers.

Striking doctors said that the union issued false statements through its web site and faxes that the demands were met and the strike was postponed.

Abdel Fattah Rezaq, union board member said, "The syndicate agreed on the idea of a one-day strike because it was a civilized way to convey our demands, but the decision to start an open strike was forced haphazardly

by a group of young enthusiastic doctors.

“The organizers broke the ethics and moral code of the profession and insulted the head of the syndicate, a senior doctor. Young doctors were used by the strike leaders for the benefit of doctors running in the next elections.”

Organizers of the strike said that hospital managers admitted patients and examined them to prove that there was no strike, while some threatened doctors using thugs at Al-Anfoushy Hospital in Alexandria and in Damietta. A clinic manager at Al-Mounira Hospital assaulted one doctor.

Dr. Ehab Ismail at Al-Mounira Hospital said, “We are the ones who care about the patient the most; no patient who needed treatment was turned back and we spent our private money to provide medicine to patients today.”

The strike includes all but emergency and dialysis operations staff, emergency surgeries, deliveries and intensive care unit staff.

Doctors threatened to submit collective resignations and organize a million-strong march in Tahrir if their demands were not met.

Ahram Online reported on a May 16 solidarity demonstration supporting the ‘doctors’ demands.

Egyptian students and professors call for dismissal of university presidents and faculty deans

Hundreds of students and university professors staged demonstrations in front of the national cabinet May 17, demanding the dismissal of university presidents and faculty deans by the end of this academic year, according to a report by *Al Masry Al Youm*.

The students and professors are demanding that in future senior university administrators should be elected rather than appointed.

Students at the High Institute of Technology also staged protests, demanding that the institute should be turned into a genuine faculty of engineering.

The protesters clashed with the staff of the Ministry of Education and claimed that staff tried to disperse them with fire extinguishers.

Israeli singers and opera workers in dispute

The Histadrut trade union federation told executives of the Israeli National Opera May 17 that it will call for a partial work stoppage over what it said was management’s refusal to answer demands for collective bargaining and better working conditions for employees.

The opera workers say that they are paid only per project, that their salaries do not reflect seniority, and that they do not have job security and work under extremely difficult conditions and schedules. They receive no compensation for travel, a situation they called particularly difficult for those taking part in dispersed performances.

Israeli doctors’ strike to put hospitals on reduced schedules

A strike by public sector doctors is ongoing this week in hospitals around the country, after the Israel Medical Association (IMA) said the Treasury had refused to discuss upgrading manpower in the hospitals and

failed to offer talks.

The medical centres are to function on a reduced schedule throughout, in which only urgent and lifesaving operations will be conducted, but duty doctors will be in the wards.

Oman: Protests, demonstrations for better pay, against corruption

A rally took place May 9 in Muscat and a series of sit-ins were reported May 10 across Oman. According to *Gulf News*, the army “tightened security in Jalan Bani Bu Ali in the east where angry job seekers had vandalised property on Sunday [May 8].”

Sources cited by the news agency said safety and security staff at the Petroleum Development Oman’s (PDO) oilfields in Marmul and Faud picketed on the airstrip at these facilities. The fire safety staff at the oilfields reportedly went on strike, demanding better wages and contracts.

Gulf News cited a “posting on local social media web site Oman Sabla, staff of Oman Polypropylene, the company which is now part of the Oman Oil Refineries and Petroleum Industries (ORPI). Oman Refineries and Petrochemicals Company, Oman Polypropylene and Aromatics Oman were merged to form ORPI.

“Some pictures from the peaceful sit-in at the Sohar Industrial Port premises of the company have also been posted on the social media. According to some of the striking staff members, they want management to pay heed to the demands they made a month ago.

“They want parity of wages among all the three merged companies and want security and technical allowances. They are also demanding ‘Islamic Housing Loan’ to build houses for the employees. They also want the company to spell out policy regarding the bonus after the merger of the three companies to create new entity ORPI.”

On May 9, a demonstration of around 50 activists, took place outside the Housing Ministry in Al Khuwair, demanding action against those they have charged for corruption. The demonstrators also demanded improved social security benefits, as well as subsidised charges for the basic utilities such as electricity and water.

Sudanese doctors’ strike

Doctors across Sudan went on strike this week, affecting many hospitals across the country. Doctors in emergency units were excluded. The doctors are protesting the failure of the government to fulfill promises to improve pay and conditions.

Over the last year the doctors have tried unsuccessfully to get the Ministry of Health to address their concerns over unpaid back pay, pay increases and improved housing and work environment.

Sudan has suffered a cut in foreign investment and brought in a series of austerity measures this year to curtail spending.

Nigeria: Bottling plant strike

Over 300 workers employed at the Nigerian Bottling Company factory in Akidingbi, Ikeja in Lagos state went on strike on Monday. They were striking against the low wages they receive, getting around N13, 500 (\$86)

a month. The workers are unable to support themselves and their families on such wages.

The workers had contacted their union on several occasions to ask them to intervene on their behalf. One worker involved in the action told the press they were taking the action because, “Enough is enough.”

The workers are employed on a casual basis, yet many of them have worked for the company between four and eight years. Among their demands were better pay and regularization of their employment terms.

Ugandan sugar factory strike

Workers at the Kakira sugar factory in Jinja District staged a sit down strike last Friday, demanding a wage increase. The factory is the largest in Uganda. Inflation is currently running at around 10 percent. One of the workers explained, “Working for Sh70,000 (\$29) per month is now useless with the current inflation.”

After meeting with the workers, the factory managing director said he would hold discussions with the union. The factory employs around 7,000, with some only working on a casual basis, being hired on an as-needed basis.

Entebbe airport cleaners sit-down strike

On Monday around 100 workers employed by Guardian Services Limited (GSL) held a sit-down strike protesting at low pay. The cleaners took the impromptu action shortly after arriving for work Monday morning. Like many other workers in Uganda, they are being hit by the high level of inflation eating into their already low wages.

Police intervened and persuaded the workers to end their sit-in on the basis that GSL management representatives would not be available till the next day to be able to take up their concerns.



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