

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

10 June 2011

## Portuguese cabin crew in rolling strike

Cabin crew employed at the state-owned carrier TAP Air Portugal are to stage 10 days of strikes over the next two months in protest at staff cuts.

The National Union of Civil Aviation Flight Attendants said June 8 that staff will walk off the job on June 18, 19, 20, 25 and 26, and on July 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29.

TAP Air Portugal is aiming to save €14 million (\$20 million) a year by cutting one attendant per flight, claiming the new staffing level will bring it into line with the international average.

TAP Air Portugal is slated for privatisation this year, as part of revenue-raising measures attached to a €78 billion national bailout provided by the European Union and the International Monetary Fund.

## French cement workers strike

Workers at Lafarge cement plants conducted a four-hour strike June 6, in protest at the company's plans to shut its Frangey cement facility around 170 kilometres southeast of Paris.

Workers blocked trucks at the Frangey plant, and work stoppages took place at around a dozen Lafarge sites in support of the 74 workers whose jobs are threatened.

Twenty contractors also work at Frangey.

Lafarge announced May 25 that it would close the plant by the end of 2012.

## Northern Ireland council staff in solidarity strike

Around a hundred staff at Derry City Council staged an unofficial walkout, gathering outside the council's headquarters June 2, to protest the suspension of a colleague.

Unions have accused management of using CCTV footage as evidence in a disciplinary case and claim it is against agreed procedures.

Delegates from the Northern Ireland Public Service Association (NIPSA) broke away from their annual conference in the city to join the 40 minute protest.

## English refuse collectors extend strike

Some 120 refuse collectors in Southampton, England, have extended their week-long strike to a fortnight, over a proposed 4.5 percent pay cut.

This is the second wave of walk-outs against the decision of the Conservative leader of the council to impose new, inferior contracts on the city's 4,300 council employees.

The workforce has until July 11 to accept the reduced terms, or face losing their jobs.

In February, councillors announced budget cuts of £25 million, adding that all workers earning more than £17,500 (65 percent of current staff) would have their pay cut by reducing working hours. The city council said the alternative to pay cuts was to lose another 400 staff on top of the previous 285 job cuts.

## Cypriot teachers in north threaten strike over privatisation

Teachers this week threatened a fresh wave of industrial action, after it was announced the running of two schools (a primary and secondary school attached to the Eastern Mediterranean University [EMU] in Famagusta) would be taken over by a Turkish education conglomerate.

Huseyin Ozkaramanli, head of EMU's DAU-SEN union, said, "Piece by piece our assets are being sold off. The next target is the university itself".

He believed businessmen behind Turkish-owned Doga (Nature) College, which has signed a 10-year lease to run the EMU's primary and secondary establishments, have their sights set on the money making potential of EMU's approximately 20,000 students.

The northern Cyprus Education Minister Kemal Durust claimed he had known nothing of the deal until after it was signed, adding that EMU was an autonomous body that did not need his permission to enter into private deals.

## Workers at Cyprus' largest industrial employer to strike

Workers at the church-controlled wine and beer maker KEO plc went on strike May 31 following management's refusal to offer adequate compensation for job losses.

The recent announcement of the dismissal of 75 workers—the first stage of redundancies that have sparked indefinite industrial action at the company—form part of the total 150 jobs KEO is seeking to cut from a workforce of around 550.

In February, the company announced that it was planning to lay off possibly a quarter of the workforce, due to the effects of the economic downturn. Striking workers prevented company managers from entering

work premises.

Following comments by Archbishop Chrysostomos that workers should “come down to earth”, or they will have “a bad landing”, the striking staff called on the archbishop to refrain from statements that incite tension.

Union demands on compensation are around €5.2 million, while the ministry has suggested €2.5 million. The group’s turnover for 2009 was €54.6 million, around €10 million less than the previous year. In 2009, KEO posted a net loss of €3.7 million. In 2010, the KEO Group made a net loss of €3.4 million.

KEO is the largest beverage company in Cyprus and the largest industrial employer.

### **Indian workers in hunger strike at embassy in Bahrain**

Forty-one stranded Indian workers employed at a construction company in Bahrain staged a hunger strike (or dharna) this week in front of Indian Embassy, demanding to be sent home.

The workers say they were not provided with proper food or accommodation, and wages were only paid irregularly.

### **Israeli bandage factory workers protest closure, job losses**

Around 100 employees of Sderot-based bandage-producing facility, Nisan, gathered in front of the Knesset June 6, to protest the decision to close the factory this month.

The Knesset’s Labor, Welfare and Health Committee is discussing the issue. The workers’ representatives and the Histadrut trade union federation are calling for a state take-over.

### **Tunisian telecom workers strike**

The Tunisie Telecom workers strike, which began mid-May, continues. The workers are seeking a pay increase and opposing plans to cut jobs to boost profits and increase liquidity.

The company was partially nationalised in January, following the ousting of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. The Dubai company Emirates International Telecommunications (EIT) bought a 35 percent share of the company in 2006.

### **Botswana public sector strike**

A strike by 90,000 public sector workers that began April 18 continues, but unions have accepted the three percent pay offer made by the government. The workers demand was for a 16 percent rise, and the initial government offer was 5 percent.

Currently the only sticking point is the Directorate of Public Service Management’s (DPSM) refusal to reinstate 1,500 essential workers who were dismissed for joining the strike. The DPSM say they must reapply for their jobs.

### **Namibian plastic package workers strike**

Around 200 workers at three sites for the Plastic Packaging Group of Companies went on strike this week.

The workers are members of the Metal and Allied Namibian Workers Union. They are seeking a pay increase of N\$150 (\$22) a month and a housing allowance increase of N\$300 (\$44). The union says some of the workers earn less than N\$2,000 (\$300) a month. The company offer is for a N\$50 a month pay increase and N\$200 housing allowance increase.

### **South Africa Pick’ n Pay strike**

More than 20 workers at the Pick’ n Pay store in the Nonkqubela shopping mall in the Khayelisha township, Cape Town, began a strike Saturday demanding an eight percent pay increase. The franchise-owned store has offered five percent. The workers have appealed to shoppers to boycott the store.

One striker explained that they are not given contracts as permanent workers. She said she had worked at the store for two years, and was only paid R1,000 (\$150) a month and sometimes less, depending on shifts.

### **Ugandan tea workers strike**

Hundreds of workers at the Hima tea plantation in Kyenjojo, in southwestern Uganda went on strike last Friday. They are seeking an increase in the amount paid for leaves picked, from Sh70 (3 US cents) to Sh100 (4 US cents). They were also protesting the lack of care for workers who fall sick.

The workers called off their strike when the company said they would meet with the workers’ union representatives in July to discuss their grievances.

### **Zimbabwean school examination workers strike**

Zimbabwean School Examinations Council workers began a strike Monday. They are responsible for the administration of Ordinary and Advanced level exams due to be sat in June. More than 50,000 candidates are due to sit the exams.

Pay negotiations have taken place since last year, and, according to the National Education Union of Zimbabwe, pay increments due in January failed to materialise.



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