

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

17 June 2011

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

Air France engineers in open-ended strike over wages

Aviation engineers at the national carrier Air France went on an open-ended strike June 13, to demand a wage rise.

Delays are expected to flights in and out of Paris Charles de Gaulle and Orly airports.

Sheffield University staff strike over pensions

A 24-hour strike by hundreds of support staff at Sheffield University, England took place June 10 over pensions, after talks between management and unions broke down.

The strike was undertaken by the university's lowest paid workers, including porters, cleaners, security and office staff.

The dispute arose following an announcement by the University Council that they are to scrap their current pension scheme and introduce a new scheme, which will mean lower-paid workers receive thousands of pounds less each year.

According to the Unite and Unison unions, the university's lowest-paid staff, some of whom earn between just £3,000 and £16,000 a year, will be forced to join a new Cash Balance Scheme, which will see their already meagre pensions halved.

Those on higher salaries, including Vice Chancellor Keith Burnett who earns £294,000 per year, will continue to benefit from membership of the Universities Superannuation Scheme and its final salary pension provision.

Baggage handlers strike at Barcelona airport

Baggage handlers went on strike at Barcelona's Girona airport June 15.

Girona airport is a busy hub for low-cost airline Ryanair, which advised any passengers travelling between June 17 and 20 to check whether their luggage will be accepted.

Italian dockers plan to renew strike over broken deal

The web site of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) reported June 9 that dock workers in the port of Trieste aim to renew industrial action that was suspended at the end of May, following a dispute over the implementation of a recently agreed deal.

In May, dockers staged a seven-day strike against pay cuts and the hiring of casual workers employed in substandard conditions.

An agreement was signed two weeks ago, between public and private companies operating in the port, to establish a labour supply agency under the auspices of the port authority and managed by the operators. This agreement seems to have failed.

Solidarity strike at Ireland's Connaught Telegraph

Staff at the *Connaught Telegraph*, one of the oldest newspapers in the country, began industrial action June 10 after a management decision to outsource pre-press production work (typesetting and graphic design) to a firm in England.

Seven staff members on the paper, published in County Mayo, are expected to lose their jobs with the closure of the department.

Workers joined the picket at their Castlebar base after the seven staff members were offered only statutory redundancy. Affected staff have received no pay rise in the past four years and voluntarily reduced to a three-day working week in order to cut costs.

The National Union of Journalists is not participating in the action.

The *Connaught Telegraph* was founded in 1828, and is one of the few remaining family-owned regional newspapers in Ireland.

Student nurses in Ireland to vote on pay strike

Student nurses are expected to ballot for industrial action in protest against plans to cut their pay during their mandatory placement period in hospitals.

The dispute follows a government decision to phase out payments to student nurses during their 36-week placement period in hospitals and to eliminate them completely from 2015.

This year, the pay of fourth-year students was reduced to 76 percent of the salary of a starting nurse, down from 80 percent.

Some student nurses faced a further 10 percent cut in line with the

pay reductions for all new entrants to the public service in January.

Faculty strike at Jerusalem's Schechter Institute enters week five

A long-running strike by administrative staff and faculty members at the Jerusalem-based Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies over pay has entered its fifth week.

The *Jerusalem Post* reported that President David Golinkin announced that striking employees would not receive their salaries through August 1 and that students would instead receive "pass" grades.

"In response, the institute's Academic Committee, which holds the sole responsibility and authority for academic matters, said it would not allow the management to bestow pass grades without its approval."

The paper quoted Sara-Tal Hof, a graduate student in Jewish studies, saying, "We're not angry at the staff, we're disappointed by the management and confused by their contradictory messages. We think the staff's demands are reasonable, and want them to get what they deserve."

The *Jerusalem Post* said, "Administrative staff and faculty at Schechter, which is funded primarily by donations from the Conservative Jewish community in the US, started striking after promises to reinstate cuts in their salaries made during the economic crisis were not met.

"There is now growing concern that the some of the approximately 600 students will demand the return of their tuition fees for the spring semester and that the Council for Higher Education will revoke the college's accreditation."

South African university strike

Staff at Umlazi's Mangosuthu University in KwaZulu-Natal State began strike action Monday. The workers, members of the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union, are demanding a 9 percent pay increase and a R1,100 (US\$160) housing allowance. Management have offered a 6.5 percent increase, but no housing allowance.

South African poultry workers dispute continues

Around 4,000 members of the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) working for Rainbow Chicken have been on strike for more than two weeks.

They are employed on farms and processing plants across Western Cape and Kwazulu-Natal. Rainbow is the largest chicken producer in South Africa.

The process workers are demanding a R500 (US\$75) across-the-board increase and the farm workers are seeking a minimum wage of

R4, 400 (US\$645) a month. They are also seeking a reduction in hours.

Botswana public sector workers suspend action

The strike by more than 90,000 public sector workers that began in mid-April has been suspended. The workers were demanding a 16 percent pay increase. Initially the government offered 5 percent but have reduced this to 3 percent.

A spokesman for the Botswana Federation of Public Service Unions said it was a suspension pending a special congress on 25 June. "We found the need to go back to strategize because nobody expected the strike would last this long," he claimed.

Nigerian tertiary education staff strike

Staff working in Kwara state tertiary education institutions began an indefinite strike on Monday. Four state facilities have been hit by the strike to demand employers bring in agreed salary structures.

Following a previous strike in January of this year, an agreement was signed with the 23 unions involved in the action and the state government Commissioner of Education at the end of March. Following the failure to implement that agreement, the workers began the current strike.

Tunisian customs workers set to walk out

Around 3,000 customs workers, members of the SAD union, were due to strike Monday, demanding the resignation of the customs organisation head, Tahar Htira. They accuse him of fraud and corruption. The SAD union, representing customs workers, was set up in April of this year, following the fall of the Ben Ali regime.



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