

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

20 April 2012

Workers at Strasbourg paper mill in one-day strike over plant's future

Workers at the UPM Stracel paper mill in Strasbourg staged a 24-hour strike Monday after the company announced its plans to shut the mill unless a buyer is found by the end of August.

UPM acquired the mill in 1988. It currently employs around 260 workers.

GDF Suez workers block LNG ships at French terminals in pay dispute

On Tuesday, workers at GDF Suez liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals in southern and western France blocked the unloading of vessels to demand "a better sharing out of profits."

The union said two vessels were blocked at Fos Tonkin and Fos Cavaou near Marseilles on the Mediterranean.

LNG accounts for around one third of gas supplies across France.

The workers are calling for a meeting with management to discuss a raise in their annual bonus to reflect the higher profits of the company a CDT official said, adding that no meeting had been scheduled.

French LNG workers last took action for two weeks in autumn 2010 to oppose pension reforms.

Helsinki bus drivers to hold 24-hour strike

Bus drivers working for Helsingin Bussiliikenne Oy are to go on a 24-hour strike on May 2 over the right to collective bargaining and the undermining of working conditions.

The current collective agreement between the union and management expires April 30.

Deutsche Telekom workers in wage strike

Around 8,500 workers at two units of Deutsche Telekom AG held a walkout Thursday to push for wage demands.

The Verdi union, which collects dues from more than 85,000 of Deutsche Telekom's 121,500 workers in Germany, is seeking a 6.5 percent wage increase over 12 months.

Deutsche Telekom says that demand is not justifiable considering planned restructuring and cost cuts at the company.

Several walkouts, including one involving about 6,000 workers on Wednesday, have taken place over the past few weeks.

Deutsche Telekom called for mediation, which reportedly provides a legal obligation for the union to call off the strike.

Staff at the UK Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency strike over pensions

Staff at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in Swansea are to strike May 10 over pensions. A further stoppage is scheduled for the end of June.

The strike is in opposition to changes to public sector pensions that force workers to pay higher contributions and work longer for a lower payout on retirement.

72-hour strike planned on London Underground

The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) is to hold 72 hours of strike action on the London Underground between April 24 and 27 to defend pensions and other benefits. It follows a four-to-one ballot in favour of industrial action.

Tube Lines workers are responsible for maintenance and upgrade work on the Jubilee line, Northern line and Piccadilly line. They provide a number of services across the network including the Emergency Response Unit (ERU), Distribution Services and Trans Plant.

The RMT site said “action by staff will have a serious and widespread impact across the system as well as raising serious safety concerns if management attempt to run services without proper emergency cover.”

South Yorkshire firefighters threaten strike over equipment

Firefighters in South Yorkshire have threatened strike action over plans to introduce a small incident unit (SIU) in Sheffield to extinguish small fires.

South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue plan to use the unit at Elm Lane fire station in the north of the city. It follows the removal of two fire engines from Elm Lane and Mansfield Road as part of a £10 million savings plan.

The FBU have blocked the move, arguing that a “fully-staffed, fully-equipped fire engine” should be in place, even for small incidents. It has advised its members not to carry out training on the vehicle.

John Gilliver, from the FBU, said, “The SIU is not too dissimilar to a jet wash”, adding that the vehicles were “not fit for purpose.”

Striking workers clash with police in Uganda

Around 500 workers working for Nile Agro Industries Ltd in the commercial city of Jinja went on a sit-down strike Tuesday. The police intervened to break up the sit-down strike and disperse the workers using tear gas and rubber bullets.

The workers were protesting against management posting notices in the factory that displayed changes in payment dates of workers’ salaries. The changes had been made without notice or consultation. They were also protesting announcements that any worker who failed to clock in using the new punch card system would be deemed absent.

Management announced that any employee absent for more than six days within one month will not be allowed to continue working.

A lack of protective clothing in the factory, which makes cooking oil and soap, has led to many workers suffering injuries.

African Minerals workers strike in Sierra Leone

Workers employed on a casual basis by the railway section of

African Minerals in Sierra Leone went on strike last Friday. African Minerals is one of Sierra Leone’s biggest companies. Its main activity is the mining and transport of iron ore.

The workers were opposing the late payment of wages and benefits and harsh working conditions. One told *Concord Times* journalists that they had raised their concerns with management on several occasions but to no avail.

During the strike a company jeep was set on fire.

Swaziland textile workers strike over wages claim

Workers at the Taiwanese-owned Tex Ray textile factory in Matsapha have gone on strike demanding higher pay. The mainly women workers were angry when they heard that on a visit to the factory by the Taiwanese president Ma Ying-jeou, he had been told they earned good wages and could earn up E2000 (US\$255) a month.

Strikers will not return until they are paid E2,000 a month. Much of the textile industry in Swaziland is Taiwanese-owned and many do not even get the statutory minimum wage of E420 (US\$59) a month for an unskilled worker or E600 (US\$77) a month for a skilled worker.

Swaziland teachers set strike dates

Around 300 teachers, members of the Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT) met in the city of Manzini in central Swaziland and announced a two-day strike on May 9 and 10 to demand a 4.5 percent salary increase.

The Ministry of Education declared that the union had not followed the necessary procedure to hold a mass meeting and declared it illegal. The meeting went ahead anyway. The teachers were prevented from taking part in a national day of action last week after an Industrial Court order.



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