

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

15 June 2012

Spanish miners continue strike

Miners in the northern Spanish provinces of Asturias and Leon are continuing their bitter and combative strike against the Popular Party's removal of subsidies to the industry.

This week striking miners barricaded major roads, blocked transport lines and burned tires, while miners in the Candin mine in Langredo and the Santiago mine shaft in Aller continued their underground sit-in, now in its third week.

The strike is in response to the PP's announcement that it will cut mining subsidies by 63 percent, from €300 million to €110 million. The 8,000 remaining miners in northern Spain say it will mean the complete closure of the industry. Another 30,000 related-industry jobs are expected to go.

The cuts in subsidies are part of €27 billion in cuts already planned this year that will further decimate health, education and welfare. Only last weekend it was announced that Spanish banks are to receive a €100 billion bailout from the European Financial Stability Facility that will inevitably be tied to even more draconian austerity measures.

The response of the ruling authorities and its state apparatus towards the miners is brutal. In Asturias, the Civil Guard has been mobilised and is reported to be invading mining villages, using rubber bullets and tear gas.

Further strikes over pensions at East Midland Trains, England

Two further days of industrial action have been announced in the dispute between train drivers and East Midland Trains over management plans to cut pensions.

The rail workers are to go on strike June 23 and June 25. Further dates are to be announced in July and August.

Industrial action continues at recycling centres in Sheffield, England

Industrial action by workers at five recycling centres across Sheffield continues, with a further three days of strikes from Wednesday to today.

This is the fourth three-day strike period to resist seven redundancies and cuts to conditions arising out of Sheffield City Council cutbacks. The council plans to save around £500,000 by reducing the opening times of the five recycling depots in Sheffield.

On top of payments made by the city council, huge profits are made by the contracted company Veolia Environmental Services and its subcontractor SOVA Recycling Ltd through the recycling of such articles as electrical equipment, scrap, paper and cardboard.

Last week, Sheffield City Council announced that it is to change its bin collection frequency from weekly to fortnightly from next month. The

declared aim is to save £2.5 million a year. This will lead to an estimated 42 minimum job losses.

London tube workers vote for action in service control dispute

Staff on the London underground voted overwhelmingly this week for industrial action and action short of a strike—by 70 percent and 80 percent respectively—in a dispute over jobs and conditions of service.

Workers are concerned about proposals by London Underground regarding the move of Piccadilly Line Service Control to Hammersmith Service Control.

These concerns include the non-payment of the Service Operator 3 rate of pay; the Treatment of ex-apprentice secondee Service Operators; staffing cuts for Service Control at Neasden SCC (Jubilee); the absence of a serious offer for Service Control staff for the Olympic period and Hammersmith signal cabin grading.

UK school teaching assistants to strike over jobs

According to the *Croydon Advertiser* newspaper, teaching assistants (TAs) have voted to strike to defend their jobs at a Norbury Manor Primary school.

School management told their TAs that at least 10 of them could be leaving, to be replaced by a full-time teacher.

The proposal is being promoted to supposedly raise standards at the school. But the TAs "believe this would not make any difference and have decided to strike, after a ballot in which almost 90 percent of them supported the move," reported the paper.

Irish water workers to be balloted for strike over jobs transfer

Ireland's public sector union SIPTU is to ballot employees in County Leitrim Council's water services on strike action, the *Leitrim Observer* has reported. It is over plans to transfer staff to the Irish Water utility company; a new company being set up by the government.

Its specific purpose is to impose metered water charges on all households—one of the conditions made by the European Union/International Monetary Fund in return for their bailout of Irish banks.

The dispute would involve around 2,500 workers employed in local authority water services, which include caretakers, network staff, plumbers and inspectors.

Latvian Opera choir strike over pay, workload, contracts

“Latvian National Opera (LNO) choir’s trade union, after today’s talks with management, declined to call off its strike. Management, meanwhile, said it will sit back and wait for the court’s ruling on the strike’s legality,” said the *Baltic Times*, June 7.

Among the grievances of choir members are low salaries, heavy workload and improper contracts.

Norwegian oil workers strike over pay and conditions

At least five of Norway’s oil and gas rigs were shut this week due to a strike by 114 workers at oilfield service company Baker Hughes Inc., which began Saturday.

The strike could delay scheduled drilling of production and exploration wells for a range of giant oil companies such as Statoil ASA, Marathon Oil Corp., Exxon Mobil Corp., Royal Dutch Shell PLC, Suncor Energy Inc., Centrica PLC, and Eni SpA, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

This comes ahead of a potentially larger strike in the country’s dominant export oil sector. The national mediator has set a June 23 deadline for this year’s wage settlement between unions and the oil industry after negotiations failed over Statoil’s ending of an early pensions deal. “Any resultant strike could shut down most of Norway’s daily production of 3.8 million barrels of oil equivalent,” said the *Journal*.

Rigs affected by the Baker Hughes strike include Songa Trym, Stena Don, Songa Dee, Oseberg C, Oseberg Ost, Brage, Gullfaks C, Transocean Winner, West Alpha, Songa Delta, West Navigator, Ringhorn and Scarabeo 8, according to the Oil Industry Association.

Workers at Baker Hughes are striking because the company changed its conditions after acquiring BJ Services in February.

Zambian sugar workers strike

Around 3,000 workers at Zambia Sugar’s Nakambala Sugar Estate went on strike Tuesday to demand a 35 percent pay rise.

Zambia Sugar is owned by the South African company Illovo Sugar, which has declared the strike illegal. This was seconded by the union, who told the employees to return to work.

The company and the union had been in negotiation over pay from January up to May, when the talks collapsed. Zambia Sugar anticipates a 7 percent increase in production this year over last.

Swazi teachers to take two-day strike action

Following a ballot earlier in the month, teachers in the Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT) were due to begin a two-day strike Thursday. This is in pursuit of a 4.5 percent cost-of-living adjustment.

The education ministry has warned any teacher taking part in the strike will lose pay for the days absent.

Namibian meat production workers protest

Workers at Meatco, Namibia’s biggest exporter of beef, demonstrated outside the company’s headquarters last week and threatened to strike if the company did not address their grievances within seven days. Workers are represented by the Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU).

They are calling for a minimum wage of N\$5000 (\$595) a month, for all contract workers to be given permanent employment after three months, and for long service bonuses to be paid to employers after five and ten years.

Medical staff in Kenya strike to defend colleague

Medical staff represented by the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPPDU) at the Gertrude Garden Children’s hospital in Nairobi went on strike at the weekend to demand the reinstatement of a colleague who was dismissed after becoming pregnant.

Tensions had arisen at the hospital over the last six months after KMPPDU had attempted to get hospital management to agree its right to represent the 70 medical staff employed there. The hospital management has refused and following the declaration of strike action went to court to call for the arrest of union officials.

Nigerian hospital workers strike

Workers at the Federal Medical Centre (FMC) in the Ogun state capital of Abeokuta began an indefinite strike last week. Unions representing technicians, nurses, midwives and pharmacists are protesting the autocratic management of the FMC director, Dr. Dapo Sotiloye, who was recently re-appointed.

They are also protesting plans to cut staff numbers by 450. However, the chair of the Ogun state medical union’s umbrella body, Samuel Idowu, has said he does not oppose cutting staff numbers per se, but the manner in which it is proposed to carry it out.

Nigerian polytechnic staff lock-out rector

Staff, both academic and non-academic, took indefinite strike action Friday last week to protest non-payment of allowances. They barred the polytechnic’s rector, Theresa Akande, from the building.

Akande said she was unable to pay the allowances as they had not been approved by the federal government. The joint action follows action by non-academic staff the previous week over the same issues.

South African textile workers declare dispute

The Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU)

have gone to the National Textile Bargaining Council (NTBC) to declare a wage dispute. This came after textile employers tabled a final 5.5 percent pay offer; the union is seeking a 7.5 percent increase.

The NTBC will now impose a conciliation process, but if that produces no agreement SACTWU will ballot its 5,000 members employed nationally in around 50 factories.

Striking South African gold miners sacked

Over 1,000 gold miners working at the Gold One's Modder East mine near Johannesburg have been sacked. Just less than 2,000 miners are employed at the mine. They had gone on strike June 3 demanding substantial pay increases. The CEO for Gold One insists that all miners at Modder East were subject to a three-year wage deal signed in 2010.

The sacked miners were members of the Professional Transport and Allied Workers Union (PTAWU). Gold One does not recognise PTAWU, but only the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The NUM has said it is prepared to meet with Gold One management to attempt to get the miners reinstated.



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