

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

22 June 2012

## Ford UK strike over pay, pensions

Ford workers at sites across the country, including Halewood on Merseyside, struck for 24 hours Monday over plans to close the final salary pension scheme to new starters and lower their rates of pay by up to 10 percent from next year.

The dispute directly concerns 2,500 white-collar workers employed by Ford. It is the first such action since the 1980s.

Staff voted by 67 percent on a 100 percent turnout for industrial action on May 22, but the Unite union agreed to postpone announcing the ballot result to enable further negotiations with the company to take place. A series of talks proved fruitless. Ford refuses to give assurances they will not close the pension scheme completely.

The production and sites affected by the strike included the manufacturing engine/stamping and diesel design centre at Dagenham; manufacturing engine plant, Bridgend; transmission plant, Halewood; parts distribution centre, Daventry; transit assembly plant, Southampton; Ford of Britain HQ, Warley; and Design and technical centre, Dunton, Basildon.

## Security workers at German airports strike over pay and conditions

Private security workers held a two-hour strike at major German airports on Thursday in a dispute over pay and working conditions. Airports affected included Frankfurt, Dusseldorf, Hamburg, Bremen and Hanover.

## UK doctors strike

Thousands of hospital doctors and GPs took 24-hour strike action Thursday in a UK-wide protest over pensions.

It is the first strike by doctors in almost 40 years, after members of the British Medical Association voted by a majority for action. They oppose government moves to increase pension contributions and introduce a later retirement age.

Hospitals cancelled non-urgent operations and only accepted emergencies. Routine duties, including repeat prescription requests, were stopped for the day.

The action was bitterly denounced by the government and most of the media, with Health Secretary Andrew Lansley saying the strike was “useless”.

## Technical staff may strike over planned cuts at Aer Lingus

Reuters reported June 17 that the union representing Aer Lingus technical staff said it “expected the Irish airline to cut or relocate 55 employees from Ireland’s Shannon Airport.” Such a move would “likely to lead to industrial action.”

The Unite union said it believed Aer Lingus was planning to announce the closure of its maintenance operations in Shannon in a matter of weeks.

Any action is likely to involve less than 10 percent of the airline’s workforce, according to the union, but would cause significant disruption to the airline during the summer season. At the beginning of last year, an industrial dispute concerning cabin crew halted Aer Lingus flights for three weeks.

## Strike by Portuguese ferry workers

Ferry workers in Lisbon staged a partial strike on Monday against the government's austerity measures and its impact on working conditions and living standards.

The workers walked off the job between 6 and 10 a.m. and between 4 and 9 p.m., bringing services to a halt.

### **Construction workers in Poland mount blockade**

Construction workers blockaded one of the main roads leading to the new Arena Gdansk, ahead of a European Championship football match Monday, in a dispute over unpaid wages.

The workers say that the Hydrobudowa Polska, a consortium responsible for the construction of the road and other projects related to the European championship, had not paid the subcontractors US\$14.5 million. The firm recently filed for bankruptcy.

### **Norwegian oil workers threaten strike**

Oil workers in Norway are threatening to strike unless wage talks today result in an improved pay offer from management. They also want the right to retire at 62.

The Norwegian Oil Industry Association has said that it will not discuss pensions at the talks, leading to the strike threat. Unions say that a strike by 700 workers would take place initially, targeting the Statoil-operated fields of Heidrun and Oseberg.

Norway is Europe's second biggest gas exporter.

### **Turkish Airlines refuses to rehire sacked workers**

The chairman of Turkish Airlines, Hamdi Topçu, has said the company will not rehire 350 workers sacked after they took action against a new law banning strikes in the aviation industry. He told the daily *Hürriyet*, "Turkish Airlines is a private company with 51 percent of its stakes publicly traded. The laid-off people can only return to their jobs on a judicial ruling."

The workers had held a slowdown strike on May 29 against the draft law banning strikes. Labour Minister Faruk Çelik has said he hopes to act as a mediator in the dispute, as

the law only went into effect on June 3.

### **Namibian soft drink workers strike**

Several hundred workers at Namibia Beverages bottling factory in Oshakati, northern Namibia, went on strike at the end of last week. They are members of the Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU).

The factory bottles soft drinks for several brands including, Coca Cola, Fanta and Schweppes. The strike has disrupted supplies in Namibia's Northern provinces.

They are demanding a monthly salary of N\$3500 (US\$425) for category-one workers, who currently earn N\$1755 (US\$215) and a 14 percent pay increase for category-two workers. The strike took place after negotiations between NAFAU and the company broke down. The company had offered an N\$275 (US\$34) a month for category-one workers and an 8.5 percent pay increase for category-two workers. NAFAU branch organiser Simon Muukapo said the strike will continue until the company is prepared to return to pay talks.

### **Nigerian local government workers continue strike**

Members of the National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) in the central Nigerian state of Plateau have vowed to continue their two-week strike in the face of threats by the state government to enforce a "no work, no pay" policy.

They began their strike demanding they be paid the N18,000 (US\$110) minimum wage a month. Since January, they have only been paid N9,000 (US\$55) a month.

The state government has convened a committee on collective bargaining to try to broker talks between the NULGE and the Plateau state Ministry of Local Government.



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