

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

26 April 2013

Lufthansa ground staff strike

Lufthansa cancelled most of its flights on Monday due to a strike over pay. Flights from major European capitals, as well as German cities such as Frankfurt, Munich and Hamburg, were affected by the action which saw just 32 out of 1,7000 scheduled departures.

It is the second strike by ground staff in two months after the airline rejected demands for a 5.2 percent pay increase. Strikers are also seeking job guarantees under conditions in which Lufthansa is seeking to cut costs to compete with low-budget carriers.

UK postal staff in half-day strike

Staff at some of the biggest post offices in the country went on a half-day strike April 19 in a dispute over shop closures, jobs and pay.

The Post Office plans to move 70 of its 370 offices from high streets into local retailers. Six are expected close, impacting on hundreds of jobs.

Crown offices—branches directly managed by the company, as opposed to locally-run by sub-post offices—handle around a fifth of Post Office business and 40 percent of financial services sales.

UK brewery staff to hold strike ballot

Around 350 workers at Molson Coors brewery in Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire, are being balloted for industrial action over changes to their contract—with union accusations they may infringe staff's human rights.

The Molson Coors-run brewery, one of the largest breweries in the UK, produces Carling, Grolsch, Coors Lite and Cobra lagers on site, as well as beers such as Worthington. The brewery is consulting the site's 455-strong workforce on changes to work patterns and contracts.

Proposed changes to shift patterns are expected to leave workers either working, or on a day's notice to come to work, while pay for some posts could be cut by up to £9,000.

The Unite union says it has been informed by the employer that workers could be contacted even while on annual leave.

London Underground cleaning workers ballot for industrial action

Cleaners working for Danish corporation ISS on London Underground are to be balloted for industrial action in a dispute over pay and working conditions.

The dispute follows the recent announcement that ISS will be retaining the Tube Lines contract for another six years.

Among the issues in dispute is ISS' failure to pay the London Living Wage until six months into the contract, introduction of stringent attendance rules to monitor sickness and absence, new rosters that extend the unpaid break in the middle of the shift from 30 minutes to up to 75 minutes and the introduction of biometric and fingerprint booking.

Main Irish teaching unions to ballot for industrial action

On April 19, the executives of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland and the Teachers' Union of Ireland announced they are to ballot for industrial action following the rejection of the Croke Park II agreement drawn up between the government and the trade unions.

The ballots will be for industrial action up to and including strike action.

Teachers in Birmingham, UK strike over academy status

Teachers at Hamstead Hall secondary school, Birmingham took strike action Thursday against plans to change the school to academy status in June. Academy schools are free from local education authority control and can set their own pay and conditions for staff.

Academy status is being forced on hundreds of schools across England as part of continuing efforts to privatise education. Members of the National Union of Teachers are involved in the action which affected years eight, nine and ten.

Egyptian health workers' vigil

Egyptian doctors have fought an ongoing battle for regulations that would state terms of employment, salaries and promotions within the profession. They want a framework that stipulates free health care for the poor and fair compensation for doctors. They have threatened to go on strike again if their demands are not met.

“Doctors and pharmacists from several professional groups held a vigil outside the Shura Council Tuesday to highlight the need for more health funding,” reported *Al-Masry Al-Youm* this week.

The news source continued, “The demonstration by the Doctors Without Rights, Pharmacists Without Rights, Health Defense and Doctors Ultras movements came as the upper house of Parliament reviews the fiscal year 2013/2014 budget proposed by the Cabinet.”

Previously, doctors went on strike for nearly three months beginning last October to demand an increase in the Health Ministry’s budget, better security for hospitals and a review of administrative and financial matters within the sector.

Riot police in Mozambique fire on protesting former brickmakers

On April 18, riot police in Mozambique fired live ammunition in order to disperse around 200 protesting former brickmakers, who were demanding one of their representatives be released. The previous day, Refo Agostinho was seized and taken to a police station in the northern Tete province.

The workers had been staging a sit-in at the Moatize mine owned by a Brazilian firm, the Vale Group, and are demanding full compensation for the loss of employment due to them being resettled 35 kilometres away to make room for the mine. Workers blocked two roads and a railway line leading to the mine.

The AFP agency cited an activist, Rui de Vasconcelos, who denounced the police violence, stating, “Police are shooting into the air with real bullets. They want people to disperse. The constitution gives us the right to protest. Why do police react like this?”

To date the workers have received only around \$1,900 each in compensation, paid in 2008, and insist they are entitled to up to \$32,000 for the loss of their livelihoods.

Following the April 17 action, one of the protesters told the Sapa-AFP, “The protest will continue. People are prepared to stay here six months, up to a year. Vale will stay shut, unable to work.”

South African teachers strike

On Wednesday, around 25,000 striking teachers marched in the northern city of Pretoria, South Africa, while others marched on the parliament buildings in Cape Town. The teachers, members of the South African Democratic Teachers Union, have been taking go-slow action since Easter.

They are protesting moves to make education an essential service, which would make taking strike action illegal, and against low wages and structural deficiencies in the education system. They are calling for the resignation of Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga and her director general.

South African bus workers strike

South African bus workers began a nationwide strike this week. They belong to the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) and the Transport and Omnibus Workers Union. The strike follows three rounds of failed talks with employers. They are seeking an 18 percent pay increase against an employers’ offer of 6.5 percent.

SATAWU threatened to call out railway workers, truck drivers and dock workers to join the action if talks had made no progress.

Togo teachers continue strike

The majority of striking teachers in Togo refused the government’s pleas for them to return to work on Monday. The teachers came out on strike two weeks ago, along with health workers demanding a 100 percent pay increase.

Students, who had come out in protest to support the striking teachers, were attacked by police, leaving two students dead. Speaking to the press, one striking teacher explained, “We cannot return to classes under the present situation. We demand action against those who killed these two pupils.”

Workers employed by Carlsberg Malawi Ltd begin strike

Brewery workers employed by Carlsberg Malawi Ltd at their Makata Industrial area site in Ndiranda township went on strike Monday. They were protesting the company’s reduction of their staff bonus from 125 percent promised at the end of last year down to 25 percent.

Speaking to the press workers stated, “We will not go back to work until we receive what we deserve... We were supposed to receive these bonuses long time ago in December.”



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