

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

10 May 2013

## Europe

### German engineering workers strike

Around 100,000 metal and electrical workers went on strike across Germany May 7 to demand a pay increase. The workers previously struck May 2.

The IG Metall union is calling for wage rises of up to 5.5 percent for some 3.7 million workers from May, and has so far rejected an offer from employers to increase wages by 2.3 percent from July following two months without a raise.

IG Metall and employers started a third round of negotiations in Baden-Wuerttemberg on Tuesday evening. According to *Reuters*, “Any deal reached in the state home to major carmakers such as Daimler and Porsche as well as manufacturers such as printing machine maker Heidelberger Druck would set the tone for wage hikes in the engineering sector nationwide.”

Further strikes are planned in Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia.

### UK postal workers stage fourth day of action

Postal workers in the UK’s biggest post offices have staged a fresh strike over jobs, pay and branch closures.

This is the fourth round of industrial action in recent weeks. Members of the Communication Workers Union at hundreds of Crown offices walked out for the day. Postal workers had voted nine-to-one in favour of a full-day strike to be staged on the day after the May bank holiday.

The Post Office intends to transfer 70 of its big high street and city centre branches to retailers. An estimated 800 Post Office jobs are expected to be affected and staff are likely to receive inferior pay, pension and working conditions.

### Cleaning workers walk-out at Manchester Airport, England

Some 100 workers employed by the cleaning firm MITIE, one of the country’s biggest, at Manchester Airport voted in favour of a 24-hour strike over pay, which started 6 a.m. on May 3.

According to the *Manchester Evening News*, “[The union] Unite says staff are angry at MITIE’s plans to slash their hourly paid lunch break to

half an hour, amounting to a cut of £69.50 a month. They are also fighting proposals to chop their £20-a-month attendance bonus and are urging MITIE bosses to meet union leaders over their concerns. Staff will join picket lines outside terminals one, two, and three.”

### Thousands of Spanish health workers strike

Thousands of doctors and nurses took industrial action across the Madrid region, covering 6.5 million people, Tuesday in protest against plans to cut health care funding. The strike shut down all but urgent care in 34 hospitals and dozens of health centres.

The health workers are planning to hold five one-day strikes every week through early June over the regional government’s plans to hand control of six public hospitals over to private companies.

Susana Hernandez, 45, doctor of internal medicine at one of the hospitals on the target list, was quoted in *Reuters* as saying, “They move the flow of patients to benefit the privatized hospitals, while the companies’ first priority is always profit. We’ve asked for their figures to show how much they’ll save, but their stats show this sale is a bargain (for the companies).”

An anonymous source at Madrid’s regional government said the 10-year contracts to run the six hospitals would cost the government around €4.6 billion (\$6 billion).

The European Commission has instructed Spain to slash its public budget. Opinion polls show 70 percent of the Spanish population oppose health care privatization.

### Action “deferred” at Dublin sewerage facility

Industrial action at the Dublin Shanganagh sewerage facility, which was due to commence Tuesday, has been deferred.

According to the SIPTU union, the strike was called in response to the attempted dismissal of a member of staff for union activity.

The waste water plant, which serves 248,000 people across the south Dublin and north Wicklow area, operates the €100 million Shanganagh/Bray mains drainage scheme opened by the Minister for Environment Phil Hogan earlier this year.

Once again, illustrating the close relationship between the unions and management, the *Irish Times* reported a spokeswoman for the employment agency ICDS as wishing to reiterate “that we have a good relationship with SIPTU whom we have always recognized and negotiated with over the years and we will continue to do so.

“We are very unhappy that anyone would suggested otherwise, indeed

we are meeting SIPTU this Thursday at the LRC [Labour Relations Commission] with a view to reaching a mutually acceptable agreement.”

### **Cypriot port workers strike**

Port workers in Limassol, the second largest city in Cyprus, staged a 24-hour warning strike May 2, over a proposal to cut their benefits and overtime pay.

According to the *Cyprus Mail*, “The strike caused substantial delays in the service to the public.”

The proposal provided for a freeze in wages, a cut in the employer’s contribution to the provident fund from seven percent to one percent, cutting 14th salaries (Easter bonus) by half and reducing overtime pay from triple to double the hourly rate.

The porters have said they intend to instigate a work-to-rule.

#### **Middle East**

### **Egyptian cement factory management use live ammunition against strikers**

Workers from a cement factory in Aswan, Upper Egypt, were attacked on May 5 by security personnel. According to a statement released by the Centre for Trade Union and Workers’ Services (CTUWS), more than 350 workers announced a strike last Friday, according to the *Daily News Egypt*. The workers had taken industrial action to demand amendments to holiday entitlements, adjustments to staff wages, and the appointment of short-term contract workers.

According to the CTUWS, the factory’s management and director of security decided to end the strike by force, using live ammunition. The factory owner had promised repeatedly to amend staff salaries and hire 250 short-term employees. There are no laws which regulate the time off staff can take, meaning that workers are often subjected to 26 consecutive days of work, 12 hours a day, without compensation. They receive just eight days of unpaid leave and earn roughly EGP 35 a day.

“Workers are also said to lack clean drinking water at work, forcing employees to drink water from a nearby well”, said *Daily News Egypt*, adding, “CTUWS said that it feared that the attack on the strikers could prompt retaliation from tribes associated with the workers.”

### **Iranian copper miners attacked by special guards**

Three hundred workers at Khatoon Abad Copper went on strike on April 24 protesting their employment status.

The gates of the complex were closed. “On April 30, special guard units attacked the strikers. The workers, however, took their sit-in inside the compounds and continued with their strike”, said the *Iran Labor Report*, May 4.

According to reports by local *Mahan News*, the protesting workers in two complexes, Khatoon Abad Copper Complex and Midok, numbered around 2,400. They do not have direct official contracts after 18 months demanding them. In 2004, an attack by security forces on Khatoon Abad Copper miners resulted in four deaths.

#### **Africa**

### **Sierra Leone diamond miners laid off**

Around 300 diamond miners at the Israeli-owned Octea Diamond Group mine in Kono district have been laid off. The miners accuse the company of laying them off because of the strike action they took last December.

In the course of that strike, two miners were killed when police intervened. The company offered to pay the workers April salaries providing they forfeited their company ID, safety boots and uniforms. The affected workers are demanding three months’ pay and benefits.

### **Ghanaian doctors continue action**

The strike by doctors in Ghana which began April 22 is continuing. It is in opposition to the introduction of the Single Spine Salary Structure (SSSS) brought in by the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission (FWSC).

A meeting organised by the FWSC scheduled for last Friday between the Trades Union Congress and the National Labour Commission was called off.

### **Ugandan packaging workers walk out**

Around 300 workers employed at Riley Packaging in Mukono in Central Uganda went on strike Saturday. The company makes corrugated cardboard boxes and other items. Strikers picketed the Mukono District Labour Office.

They accuse Riley Packaging of paying less than the agreed contract and forcing them to work a 12-hour day with no overtime payment. They were also protesting the lack of a pay increase over the past five years most have been employed there.

### **South African bus strike continues**

The strike by Golden Arrow bus drivers in Western Cape is now into its third week. The South African Transport and Allied Workers’ Union (SATAWU) called on the employer to agree a 13 percent wage increase along with travel and housing allowances by Wednesday or the action would escalate beginning this Friday, but did not spell out what that would be.

The striking drivers held a march in Johannesburg on Tuesday to press their demands.

The Congress of South African Trades Unions (COSATU), while professing its support, has called on both sides to quickly resolve the issue.

### **South African waste management workers picket**

Members of the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) at waste management company Pikitup, which serves the city of Johannesburg, went on strike Monday and picketed company headquarters. Pikitup had obtained a labour court order ruling the strike illegal at the weekend.

Their main grievance is the unsatisfactory nature of the transport arrangements made by the company, whereby employees were picked up and dropped off at specified points using their own Pikitup vehicles.

SAMWU said it was due to meet with the company to attempt to resolve the issue.

### **Strikes by Zambian miners**

Around 600 miners employed by a contracting firm at the Luanshya Copper Mines facility in Milyashi came out on strike Monday. They are members of the Mineworkers of Zambia (MUZ) and are demanding a 60 percent pay increase as opposed to the company offer of 12 percent.

Also on Monday around 400 miners at Ndola Lime went on strike. Members of MUZ and the National Union of Mines and Allied Workers are demanding an across-the-board pay increase of 40 percent. One miner told the press the company had agreed to a 40 percent pay rise in negotiations in March last year but had only given a nine percent rise.



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