

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

14 June 2013

French air traffic controllers in three-day strike

Air traffic controllers began a three-day strike Tuesday over European Union (EU) plans for a “Single European Sky,” which workers say will adversely affect their working conditions.

The strike grounded hundreds of flights (almost one in four) across the country in a Europe-wide protest against the EU plans to deregulate civil airspace. Industrial action outside France mainly involved a go-slow.

One in two flights to airports serving Paris, Lyon, Nice, Marseille, Toulouse and Bordeaux were cancelled, France’s DGAC civil aviation authority said.

Reuters said that Britain’s EasyJet had reported that it was cancelling ten to 11 daily flights to Toulouse on both Tuesday and Wednesday and would publish its schedule for Thursday on Wednesday. Air France said it was cancelling an unspecified number of short and medium-haul flights.

Portuguese postal strike

Over 85 percent of postal workers from the Lisbon distribution area were on strike last Friday, according to trade union sources. The 24-hour strike was in protest against “the privatisation of the post office” and to “defend a quality public service.”

The post network is in the process of closing 124 post offices and opening 78 postal points. The strike is set to be repeated today.

BBC staff to vote to strike over pay

Workers at the BBC in the UK are to be balloted for strikes in a pay dispute. Thousands of journalists, technical workers and other staff at the broadcasting corporation are to be balloted in the next few weeks on whether to launch a campaign of industrial action.

The unions’ pay claim was for Retail Price Indexed inflation plus 3 percent, but the BBC offered a flat-rate rise of £650.

As well as a below-inflation offer, the BBC is believed to be planning cuts to anti-social hours payments and redundancy terms. This week, the government announced a £2.22 million funding cut to the BBC World Service. The ballot for industrial action will close July 4.

Lecturers at Kirklees College, England vote for strike

Lecturers at Kirklees College have voted to take action over proposed cuts at the college, which is due to move to a new campus in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, England in the new academic year.

The University and College Union (UCU) are continuing to hold talks with college bosses in the hope of averting action. “But they admitted that feelings were running high among many of the 250 union members at the college who have been told they could face pay cuts of up to £12,000,” according to the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*.

The college is making cuts, including losing 50 jobs, as part of a budget plan informed by the loss of millions of pounds of government funding. Another factor is the costs of the move to the new Waterfront campus between Manchester Road and Chapel Hill, with interest payments for a project loan set to reach £2 million a year.

The UCU revealed Monday that a ballot for action short of a strike had been backed by 91.8 percent of the members, with a proposal for a strike receiving 79 percent backing.

Refuse collectors in Wirral, England vote to strike

Nine out of ten refuse collectors in Wirral, Merseyside, England who took part in a ballot have voted to strike, following budget cuts by Wirral council which could lead to redundancies and cuts in terms and conditions.

The dispute comes amid local authority budget cuts, including the introduction of a new charge for garden waste collection and plans for reduced street cleaning. Wirral council has committed itself to making cuts of £109 million over the next three years.

Guernsey bus drivers stage one-day strike

Bus drivers employed by the firm CT Plus in Guernsey walked out on a 24-hour strike Monday over working conditions, working hours and communications with management. The drivers planned a work-to-rule for the rest of the week.

Bob Lanning, the regional industrial organiser for the Unite trade union, told *BBC Radio Guernsey* that drivers were unhappy at being asked to work longer hours to cover staff shortages. They also wanted a pay rise, but the “straw which broke the camel’s back” was the company’s use of agency drivers from the UK to cover shifts.

He would encourage drivers to staff school bus services and to resume negotiations with CT Plus. “I want to sit down as soon as possible for a discussion, let’s call this off,” he told the BBC.

Israeli prime minister urged to end foreign ministry strike

Israeli Defence officials urged the prime minister to end a three-month strike by foreign ministry workers which, they charge, is “hurting the country’s national security,” *Ha’aretz* reported Monday.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs workers have been on a strike since March against cuts to their salaries and what they see as the “dismantling” of the ministry, as it is currently headed by no one. Following elections in January, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not appoint a foreign minister, wanting to keep the post open for Avigdor Lieberman, a former foreign minister on trial charged with fraud and breach of trust.

According to the report in *Ha’aretz*, security service Mossad chief Tamir Pardo, Shin Bet Security Agency chief Yoram Cohen and Director General of the Defense Ministry Udi Shani all met with Netanyahu on Thursday to press him to take steps to end the strike. For three months, foreign ministry workers have refused to issue passports, process cable communication between foreign missions and arrange trips for diplomats.

According to the *Times of Israel*, Shani wrote that the strike has “severely hindered the process of replacing military and defense attaches in more than 10 countries.”

Tensions mounted last week between foreign minister workers and the defence establishment, as the latter took over the arrangements for Netanyahu’s recent visit to Poland.

Egyptian teachers demonstrate in Alexandria

Hundreds of Egyptian teachers protested in front of the governor of Alexandria’s office Monday against inadequate, temporary employment contracts, reported *Ahram Online*.

Spokesman Ahmed Hamdi said, “They have spent six years on temporary contracts, with [monthly] salaries that don’t exceed LE 300 [approx. \$42].”

Egyptian university staff protest

Egyptian university staff plan to protest outside the Ministry of Finance Sunday against the current minimum wage.

According to *Al-Ahram*, the university employees announced that they will escalate their protest if salaries do not increase. The announcement came after an urgent meeting Monday evening at Cairo University, during which attendees discussed the ministry’s failure to increase salaries despite repeated promises.

On April 9, hundreds of employees from Alexandria University protested in front of the administrative building, after officials failed to increase their bonus and end-of-service reward.

In June 2011, the then-transitional government granted public servants a monthly minimum wage of LE700 (\$120). The minimum wage increase was supposed to come into effect at the start of July, the beginning of the 2011-2012 financial year. Workers have been demanding a minimum wage set at LE1,200 (\$170).

Kenyan oil refinery workers fight to save jobs

Around 200 Kenyan oil refinery workers went on strike last week. They were protesting the possible closure of East Africa’s only oil refinery facility in Mombasa. The 50-year old refinery is in need of upgrading, which would cost around US\$1.2 billion.

The plant is jointly owned by the Kenyan government and India-based Essar Energy. Workers are concerned the refining at the facility will cease and the site become just a storage facility with resultant job losses.

Namibian brick factory workers protest treatment

Last week, 18 workers employed at a Chinese-owned brick factory in Goreangab near Windhoek, Namibia protested low pay, long hours and lack of overtime pay which left them barely able to survive.

They also protested the company’s practice of issuing notices and statements in the Chinese language which they are unable to read. The factory produces around 25,000 bricks each day.

South Africa platinum miners serve strike notice

On Wednesday, platinum miners represented by the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) at the Lonmin platinum mine in Rustenburg, South Africa gave 48-hours-notice of a strike.

Lonmin management had been in talks with the AMCU over trade union recognition at the mine. AMCU currently organises 70 percent of the workforce and is seeking recognition by Lonmin. Currently the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) is the recognised union and in a labour court agreement was given until July 16 to try and regain its majority status.

Lonmin said they would regard any strike as illegal, as the dispute over union recognition was due to go to arbitration on June 26. Miners went on strike in May for two days following the killing of an AMCU official.

Namibian construction workers protest

Around 100 construction workers at Swakop Uranium’s Husab mine in the Erongo region of Namibia demonstrated Tuesday, petitioning their employer WBHO Namibia.

Development of the Husab mine began two months ago and is currently under construction. They were protesting discriminatory treatment, compared to ex-pat workers, low pay and poor allowances.

Nigerian health workers suspend strike

A national strike by Nigerian hospital staff represented by the Senior Staff Association of Nurses union and the Medical Health Workers Union have ended their five-day national strike.

They were protesting the non-implementation of the revised conditions of service agreement. Union leaders met with management and agreed the return to work, without resolution and only a promise by management to address the issue.

Ghanaian pharmacy workers continue strike

A strike by government pharmacists in Ghana has now lasted two months. They are protesting the new grading system imposed under the Single Spine Salary Structure. They are determined not to return to work until the issue is addressed.

Malawi primary school teachers protest

Primary teachers on PT4 grade, in Malawi's second city Blantyre, have gone out on strike over lack of promotions. The teachers picketed the Blantyre District Education Manager's office on Monday. They are also protesting the closure of colleges such as Domasi Teachers Training College, where they could train for job promotion.

Nigerian airline workers protest

Around 50 workers at Chanchangi Airlines walked off the job at Murtala Muhammed airport in Lagos and marched to the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) headquarters. They were protesting their 36 months' salary arrears. The NCAA authorities said they would investigate their claims.



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