

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

12 July 2013

## Europe

### Greek Public sector workers plan 24-hour general strike

Public sector workers are to walk off the job in a 24-hour general strike July 16, in protest against the government's latest plan to cut thousands of jobs as a down payment to the international banks.

The strike could coincide with a parliamentary vote on measures required by the European Union and International Monetary Fund as a condition for the next tranche of Greece's loan. Among the government measures are job cuts for school guards and other local government posts. Unemployment in Greece is almost 27 percent, twice the eurozone average.

On Wednesday, workers blocked the entrance to Athens' main City Hall as well as the town halls of other districts around the capital such as Nikaia, Elliniko and Aghios Dimitrios. Municipal workers are protesting the government plan to reduce the number of civil servants, which also includes some 4,200 teachers, school janitors and ministry employees on line for possible dismissal by the end of this month. Athens has promised to cut an additional 15,000 jobs by the end of next year.

### Royal Mail workers in Peterborough, England in wildcat strike

Around 170 workers at the Werrington postal sorting office in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire walked out in a wildcat strike July 5, which was triggered by disciplinary action against one member of staff.

Delivery and sorting staff were involved in the strike.

### Printers strike at UK packaging firm

Workers at the print unit of Crown Speciality Packaging in Bootle, Merseyside, have gone on strike after management failed to honour a pay increase.

The 28 staff who make up the firm's print unit and a further eight from other divisions are taking action after management's renegeing on a 7 percent pay increase for all print staff that was agreed and confirmed in writing last year.

A planned site move to a neighbouring facility has also not materialised.

Some workers have observed an overtime ban for the past month and taken part in two of three planned strikes.

Part of US-owned packaging group Crown Holdings, the Bootle site employs around 150 staff and produces metal cans and packaging for UK firms such as Cadbury, Jacobs and Jeyes.

### Jersey manual workers vote to strike

Manual workers on the island of Jersey voted overwhelmingly in favour of industrial action, last week, in reaction to proposed changes to their pay and conditions.

Senator Ian Gorst, head of the States Employment Board, has pledged to offer no more than two one-percent lump sums and a one percent pay rise.

The board's offer applies to all public sector workers. Teachers' and nurses' unions have said their members were also considering industrial action.

### German canal workers' strike spreads

A strike by canal workers over wage guarantees that has blocked cargo shipping in the west and south of the country is set to spread.

Lock workers blocked shipping from the German Rhine River and through all important tributary and connecting waterway canal systems in the northwestern state of North Rhine-Westphalia, which borders the Netherlands, and in the south-western state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, which borders Switzerland.

A union spokesman said the strike would continue "for several days."

Further areas affected by the strike, such as Lower Saxony, Bremen and Bavaria, are major centres for inland cargo shipping.

Planned government 'reform' of the canals is expected to involve, among other measures, a 25 percent reduction of the country's present 12,500 lock workforce.

### Strike at Mont-Saint-Michel, Normandy, closes medieval abbey

Government employees at Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy have gone on strike after management terminated the special vans that took staff to the very foot of the tidal island to begin their work shift.

The magnificent medieval abbey that dominates the bay was closed during its peak season. Thelocal.fr reported: "Striking workers at the island abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel in Brittany refused to bow down for the Tour de France on Wednesday, meaning the famous world heritage

site remained closed on possibly the biggest and busiest day in its recent history.”

On Wednesday, the dispute entered its 40th day.

### **Swissport's Spanish airport workers' strike continues**

Industrial action has taken place at eight airports across Spain on several dates over June and July, following the breakdown in negotiations over a new collective bargaining agreement. *ITF Global Union* reported July 9, “According to a joint press release from the Confederacion Sindical de Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), the Union General de Trabajadores (UGT), and the Union Sindical Obrera (USO), Swissport has been attempting to replace striking workers with temporary staff, threatening workers who are on strike, and forcing administrative staff to undertake manual handling work. The press release also alleges that Swissport are cutting corners to keep services running, which may affect passenger safety.”

### **Workers at Findus Italy strike**

Findus frozen food workers went on strike in Cisterna, Italy, last week, over news that the company is planning to lay off 99 staff at the factory.

Findus Italy, which is owned by Iglo Foods Group, confirmed on June 20 that it would lay off 99 employees at the plant, located in the historic town of Cisterna.

There have already been heavy layoffs at the plant over the past two years.

In its latest annual report, Iglo said that core category net sales in Italy were up 1.2 percent during the year, allowing for “stable market share” and “increased profitability.”

### **Middle East**

### **Strike by Turkish mint workers**

Mint workers went on strike Monday over the lack of a collective labour agreement.

The average salary of mint workers is 1,562 liras (\$835), which a union spokesperson said was “too low” considering the mint’s profits. In 2012, when the mint earned 68 million liras profit, it had produced 32 tons of gold. This year, the amount of produced gold is 60 tons.

### **Turkish steel workers' strike**

“Turkey's largest steelmaker Eregli Demir ve Celik Fabrikalar? TAS (Erdemir) has announced that its Iskenderun based subsidiary Iskenderun Demir ve Celik AS (Isdemir) has received notification that the Çelik I? labor union has decided to implement its previously announced strike decision as of July 15th 2014,” said *steelorbis.com* on Monday. On May 24, the Çelik I? labor union announced its decision to go on strike, against the background of collective labor agreement negotiations involving 6,000 workers. The negotiations between the parties are still continuing.

### **Jordanian journalists protest unpaid wages**

On July 3, members of the Jordan Press Association (JPA) council, along with *Al Arab Al Yawm* employees staged a sit-in outside the paper’s premises near the Interior Ministry Circle, in protest against the delay in paying reporters’ wages.

The journalists have not been paid for two months and are also demanding their bonus salary for 2012.

### **Jordanian vets strike**

Veterinarians working in the public sector went on an open-ended strike, last week to demand higher salaries.

In a statement issued July 3, Jordan Veterinary Association President Nabil Lobani said the Agriculture Ministry’s vets were determined to continue their strike despite “pressures” by the government.

### **Lebanon's air traffic controllers stage two-hour strike**

Air traffic controllers at Rafik Hariri International Airport staged a two-hour strike July 4 to demand higher salaries.

The *Daily Star* reported, “The employees warned in a statement that if their demands were not met soon then they would hold an open-ended strike until their salaries were raised.”

The paper said some pilots and Middle East Airlines staff joined the brief strike in a show of solidarity. According to a staff statement, the average salary of air traffic controllers at Beirut airport is only LL640,000 (\$423) plus LL39,000 for the rank.

### **Africa**

### **Mombasa council workers strike**

A strike by workers employed by Mombasa County Council is in its second week. They are striking over salary arrears. More than 2,000 marched to the county offices on Tuesday demanding payment of the arrears. The offer by Mombasa’s governor to pay the arrears to one section of workers but not others was rejected by them.

The County Council held back the pay, claiming more than 1,000 employees to be ghost workers.

### **Zimbabwean bank workers strike threat**

Employees at NMB Bank (formerly National Merchant Bank of Zimbabwe) are threatening strike action following a 30 percent pay increase awarded to managerial but not non-managerial staff.

Members of the Zimbabwe Banks and Allied Workers Union gave

management a July 22 deadline to address their grievances. The union accuses NMB of obstructing one attempt by labour officers to conduct a secret ballot of staff to determine their wishes and has demanded NMB allows a second ballot to go ahead.

### **South African airline served strike notice**

Unions representing more than 70 percent of cabin and ground staff at South African Airways (SAA) have served notice of strike action in pursuit of a 7.3 percent pay increase. SAA has offered 6.5 percent.

The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union has been given a strike certificate by the labour court for the strike to go ahead from Thursday 11 July, but were in meetings 10 July in an attempt to reach a settlement.

### **South African miners pay deal**

Miners working for the diamond producers De Beers were given a nine percent pay increase last Friday in a deal negotiated by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) just hours before a deadline to strike. Initially the NUM were seeking a 13 percent rise, with De Beers offering six percent. Inflation in South Africa is currently around 5.5 percent. The NUM represents around half the De Beers 2,550 staff.

### **Kenya teachers strike continues**

A strike by more than a quarter of a million teachers in the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) is in its third week. They are demanding that allowances paid to them are in line with other groups.

KNUT officials were ordered to attend the labour court on Wednesday 10 July. A previous order to end the strike within 24 hours had been rescinded as the union had not had correct notification.

A meeting with KNUT, the Kenya Union of Post Primary Education Teachers (KUPPET) and the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) on Tuesday 9 July to discuss their grievances ended when KNUT officials walked out. KNUT is seeking a 50 percent commuter allowance. At the talks the TSC, on behalf of the government, made a 30 percent offer to be paid in three phases.

Teachers in the KUPPET union had also been on strike over the same issue, but their action was suspended pending the negotiations. Some former KUPPET members have since joined KNUT.



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