

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

19 July 2013

Shipyard workers protest in northern Spain

Hundreds of shipyard workers protested in northern Spain on July 11 against a possible European Union (EU) ruling forcing the industry to return state aid.

Shipbuilders have been badly affected since the EU ordered the end of subsidies for the sector in 2011.

“Workers now fear Brussels may demand that the industry return the bulk of the €3 billion euros (\$4.0 billion) it received in the form of tax incentives between 2005 and 2011,” said Agence France Presse.

Protesting workers in Vigo, in Galicia, marched from the port to the European fishing agency offices shouting, “We want to work, not emigrate!”

Navantia workers in the industrial city and naval station of Ferrol, also in Galicia, went on strike for two hours.

Construction of the Australian Royal Navy’s 25,000 tonne Landing Helicopter Ship HMAS Adelaide, the last ship being made at the Ferrol estuary shipyard, was halted as 2,000 workers downed tools in protest.

In Sestao, a city in the Basque region, workers marched between two yards.

The Spanish shipyard association, representing 19 private yards, has warned that paying back the state aid would mean the end of the industry in Spain and the loss of 87,000 jobs.

Junior doctors in Ireland to take strike ballot

Non-consultant hospital doctors (NCHDs) are to be balloted next month on possible action over “dangerously” long working hours.

Under European law, NCHDs should be working a maximum of 48 hours a week, but some exceed 100 hours. The Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) says that the long hours are leading to a recruitment crisis in some hospitals and are forcing many young doctors to emigrate.

IMO Assistant Director of Industrial Relations Eric Young said patients are in danger as NCHDs are forced to work shifts in excess of 24 hours, and often 36-hour continuous shifts.

The ballot of NCHDs is to begin on August 8.

Strike by workers at Irish vegetable and salad producer

A 24-hour strike took place July 11 at vegetable and salad producer Milne Foods in Birr, Co Offaly, on the Syngefield Industrial Estate, over pay and conditions.

The public sector union, SIPTU, says the dispute centres on the company’s failure to implement Labour Court recommendations calling for a meeting with workers’ representatives to discuss improving pay and conditions. The union wants premiums for overtime and shift work to be paid.

Lock keepers strike disrupts German cargo, cruises

A week-long strike by lock-keepers in Germany was due to end last night, after causing severe disruption.

The action, called by the public sector Verdi union, was in response to plans to centralise regional waterways and shipping offices, which places 3,000 jobs in jeopardy.

Worst affected by the strike were Bavaria, Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia—key inland cargo areas. There were restrictions and blockages on key rivers and canals, including the Rhine-Herne canal, Danube, Main, Ruhr, Danube-Main connection canal, Neckar, Dortmund-Ems canal and Wesel-Datteln canal.

On Thursday, the union temporarily paused strike action at selected locks in West Germany after cargo shipping was blocked and large numbers of barges built up.

Strike of pathology workers at three Yorkshire hospitals

Pathology workers at Leeds General Infirmary, St James’s Hospital, also in Leeds, and Bradford Royal Infirmary took 24-hour action Tuesday in a dispute over working arrangements.

Unions had agreed that some staff would stay at work to provide emergency cover.

Hospital bosses say the 140 workers concerned are on more favourable terms than elsewhere. But union members claim the changes could be unsafe and cost some employees as much as £20,000 a year.

Biomedical scientist Mike O’Sullivan, a Unite union rep, said they agreed that their current working system needed to change, but the plans were to alter the systems “overnight” without extra resources.

Around 350 patient appointments were re-arranged due to the strike.

Workers at Capita UK vote to strike

Workers at the business process outsourcing company, Capita, have

voted to strike after the company offered them a 1.1 percent pay rise, despite profits and dividends to shareholders going up 10 percent.

The dispute centres on the company's performance-related pay policies, and its decision to impose a pay deal which would mean around 90 percent of staff getting a pay increase less than inflation. This follows several years of real-term pay cuts and increased pension contributions.

Listed on the London Stock Exchange as a constituent of the FTSE 100 Index, Capita is the largest business process outsourcing company in the UK with an overall market share of 27 percent in 2009, and has clients in central government, local government, and the private sector.

Industrial action at the company could affect Deutsche Bank (Abbey Life), Prudential, Royal London, Met Life, Phoenix, and Friends Life.

UK pottery workers vote for action over pay

Around 180 workers at Denby Pottery and Burleigh Pottery in Stoke, part of the Denby Holdings group, have decided to take industrial action in a dispute over pay.

They reportedly have been offered little or no pay increase over the past five years despite being asked to hit strict production targets.

Leeds council contract maintenance workers vote to strike

Over 250 Council housing maintenance workers in Leeds have voted to strike in a dispute over a performance-related bonus scheme and an alleged lack of consultation with workers.

The workers, directly employed by the company Morrison, repair and maintain 37,000 south and west Leeds homes on behalf of Leeds City Council.

According to the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, "Morrison has had a troubled relationship with the council, having been told to improve twice since it won the £175m five-year contract in 2011.

"But when the firm was taken over by Mears last year, it saw performance improve although there still appears to be tension between staff and management."

Laid-off Iranian steelworkers protest

The Iranian Labour News Agency (ILNA) reported that 180 laid-off workers from the Zagros Steel Factory gathered Tuesday on Pasteur Avenue in Tehran to protest their dismissal.

ILNA said that 235 workers were laid off last week for what management describes as "a lack of operating profit and the consequent financial constraints."

The workers, who began their protests in Kurdistan Province before going to the capital, are demonstrating against unpaid wages and the lack of job security.

An Iranian MP said this week that 82,000 steelworkers have not been paid in three months, which was blamed on international sanctions.

Hebron hospital workers to strike

Workers at a Hebron hospital announced Saturday that they will suspend health services for a week in protest over unpaid wages.

Dr. Yousef al-Takruri, chairman of the Al-Ahli Hospital workers' union, told *Ma'an* that staff had not been paid for the last three months, with some workers not even able to afford the cost of transportation to get to work.

Moroccan union representatives arrested

Two UMT (transport) union representatives were arrested last week following a march of bus drivers in the city of Fes. Police attacked the marchers and their family members. This follows a series of anti-union measures including strike-breaking and non-recognition of unions across the country.

Namibian bank workers seek pay increase

Bank workers employed by the First National Bank (FNB) are seeking a 10 percent pay increase. The workers are members of the Namibia Bank and Allied Workers Union (NBWU). The NBWU was in negotiations with the FNB, but the bank has now stated it will no longer negotiate through the union.

FNB claims to be offering a 10.7 percent pay increase, but according to the union the real figure is just over six percent. FNB workers held a march in Windhoek last week in support of their demand. Speaking to the media on Tuesday, NBWU vice president Olsen Kahiriri said the union is seeking legal advice over FNB's refusal to negotiate and added plans were going ahead for a nationwide strike of FNB staff to begin at the end of the month.

South African miners stage sit-in

Around 1,000 miners at the Cons Murch antimony and gold mine in Limpopo are on unofficial strike. Around 100 of the miners are involved in an underground sit-in protest which began on July 12. They have been joined by other miners who have surrounded the pit shaft entrance, making production impossible.

They are demanding payments of dividends owed to them by the mining company Village Main Reef. The company has been given a court ruling declaring the strike illegal and has issued dismissal letters to the strikers. Most are members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The police are maintaining a strong presence in the area.

South African telecommunication workers may strike

Talks to negotiate a new pay settlement between the three unions representing more than 20,000 workers at the telecommunications company Telkom and management broke down last Friday. Two of the unions, Solidarity and the SA Communications Union (SACU), have been given certificates of non-resolution from the Commission for Conciliation,

Mediation and Arbitration enabling them to ballot for strike action. The Communications Workers Union (CWU) is still waiting for its certificate.

The latest offer by Telkom, which was rejected by the unions, would have given some lower-paid workers a six percent pay increase over three years, but high earning workers would be subject to a pay freeze.

One of the unions is going ahead with lunchtime pickets and an overtime ban as part of its action.

Kenyan teachers call off strike

Following talks between the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) and the Kenyan Deputy President William Ruto, KNUT have ended their 24-day strike. The settlement came after the union accepted a Sh16.2 billion (\$187 million) allowance agreement to be paid in two phases.

The deal was reached just before a government order to close all primary schools indefinitely was due to come into effect.



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