

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

23 August 2013

Europe

Russian sugar workers protest factory closure

Workers at the Timashevsk sugar factory in Russia are continuing their fight to oppose the closure and sale of the factory. The closure would lead to the loss of 400 jobs and 100 families currently living in company housing would be evicted. They are owed wages backdated to May of this year.

Danish brewery workers strike

Around 130 brewery workers employed by Carlsberg at their brewery in Fredericia have gone on strike after the company hired a worker not affiliated to the union to which the 130 workers are affiliated. Their strike began on August 16 and the action has had a significant impact on supplies of draft beer throughout Denmark.

Carlsberg has begun importing beer in order to stave off a potential shortage, if the strike continues. Bloomberg report that the company has “about one week’s stock of draft products and its customers typically hold inventory of one to two weeks.”

The Danish Labour court Arbejdsretten has ruled the strikers must be fined at least 35 kroner for every hour of their strike action.

Carlsberg has applied to the court for permission to fire the strikers as their action is against their agreement with the trade union.

German lock workers in fourth action

Workers operating the lock gates on canals in the Ruhr Valley area of Germany began a four-day strike on Tuesday of this week. Their action will affect canals mainly in the state of North-Rhine Westphalia. They belong to the public sector union Verdi and their action is the fourth strike in the last two months.

They are protesting plans by the government to restructure the German inland navigation authority WSA that could lead to job cuts of about 3,000 out of a total workforce of 12,500.

Refuse workers end their action in Liverpool, England

Over 400 refuse collectors and street cleaning workers employed by Amey contracted to Liverpool council have voted to accept an improved offer ending their dispute. The workers, members of the GMB union, had been imposing a work-to-rule and held a one-day strike on August 9 that was to be followed with regular Friday strikes until October.

Amey wanted to implement fortnightly refuse collections as opposed to the current weekly ones and to sack 60 street cleaning workers. It did not specify how the fortnightly collections would affect the refuse collector workforce or what would happen to the street cleaners.

The company offered a new pay agreement for 2013. According to a GMB regional officer, after “two meetings with members in refuse services and in the street cleaning, highways and street lighting contract, the members have overwhelmingly voted to accept the offer and end the dispute.”

The officer added, “However there are reservations on how the company intends to restructure the business. This will obviously be done after full consultation with the trade unions when the time comes.”

Workers at British construction firm Kier Services vote for strike

UK building workers represented by the Union of Construction and Allied Trade Technicians (UCATT) and working for the construction, services and property group Kier Services have voted overwhelmingly for strike action. They are opposed to the company’s plans to change the day on which they paid.

Bakery workers in northwest England ballot for action over zero-hour contracts

Workers employed by the Hovis bakery in Wigan, England have voted overwhelmingly for strike action over the use of agency workers on zero-hour contracts.

Some two-thirds of the workforce are members of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU). They say that agency workers on the contracts were brought into the factory almost immediately

after 30 workers in permanent contracts were laid off in April. Those on zero-hour contracts have no guaranteed hours and limited rights on working conditions.

It is estimated that more than 1 million workers in the UK are employed on zero-hour contracts, with the numbers increasing.

Middle East

Strike by Turkish textile workers

Around 12,000 Turkish textile workers began strike action on Thursday last week after talks between employers and the Textile, Knitting and Clothing Industry Workers' Union broke down.

The workers are seeking a 15 percent pay increase and reinstatement of a previously paid quarterly salary bonus, which was reduced to two-and-a-half per year on economic grounds.

Some 30 major clothing producers are hit by the action, including Levi Strauss. Employers are offering a 3 percent increase and bonuses three times a year.

Israeli bank workers plan to escalate their action

Workers at the First International Bank of Israel are protesting overly demanding workloads and are calling for extra staff to be employed. Their action so far has consisted of strikes of only a few hours at specific branches plus a one-day strike by the entire workforce. Now the workers plan to escalate the action by an open-ended, all-out strike by the mortgage division starting next week.

There is currently a boom in mortgage applications in Israel with First International Bank having 7 percent of the market.

Africa

Egyptian steel workers' strike continues

Steel workers employed by Suez Steel have now been on strike for three weeks. They are protesting the company's failure to pay them a profit-sharing bonus that had been agreed in February 2012. A sit-in by the workers was brutally broken up by security forces during the bloody clampdown by the new military government on August 12. Two of the strike leaders, Amr Yusif and Abd-al-Rauf, were also arrested and have subsequently been released.

The strike, however, continues as Suez Steel insists the workers return to work before negotiations can begin, whilst the strikers are holding out for a written agreement and payment of wages due.

Striking Libyan Oil terminal workers face use of military force

Oil terminal guards at the key terminals of Ras Lanuf, Sedra, Brega

and Zoueitina have been on strike for three weeks. Their action has led to a significant fall in oil exports and a subsequent impact on government income.

The government is now threatening to use military force to end the strike and facilitate export of oil supplies.

South African university staff protest continues

Staff, including lecturers, at Walter Sisulu University at Mthatha in Eastern Cape, South Africa have now been on strike five weeks. They are striking in support of their demand for a wage increase of 8 to 10 percent; the university has offered 4.25 percent.

The university authorities have gone to the Labour Court in Johannesburg to apply to get the strike declared unprotected. The university claims it does not have the money to fund pay increases, having only R23.5 million (\$2.9 million) available for the financial year.

Nigerian hospital workers strike

Hospital workers including pharmacists, physiotherapists, medical laboratory scientists and other professionals at University College Hospital in Ibadan, Nigeria began an indefinite strike on Tuesday.

Amongst their demands are for the posts of chief medical directors of teaching hospitals and medical directors of federal medical centres to be open to other health professionals. Currently such posts are only open to physicians. Other demands include changes in the way teaching hospitals and medical centres are administered.

Nigerian academics continue action

Academic staff at the University of Jos, members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), have vowed to continue their strike. They are calling on the university authorities to impose the agreement on university funding, agreed between the union and the federal government back in 2009.

Dr. Jangka, the ASUU chairman at Jos University, said the agreement signed in 2009 was for N100 billion (\$621 million) to be made available each year to fund private and public universities, to enable them to improve infrastructure such as laboratories and libraries.



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