

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

14 February 2014

Europe

Irish electricians vote for nation-wide strike

Over 6000 electricians'--members of the Technical Engineering and Electrical Union (TEEU)--have voted by a 94 percent majority for strike action in opposition to proposals by the Electrical Contractors' Association to cut pay and worsen working conditions. If it goes ahead the strike will begin on February 24.

According to the TEEU General Secretary Eamon Devoy, the union is still to decide whether the strike will be against all employers or whether it will be "strategically against individual employers."

Irish airport staff vote over pensions

Airport workers at Aer Lingus, Shannon Airport Authority and Dublin Airport Authority have voted by large majorities to strike over an almost 800 million euro hole in their pension scheme. They are members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU).

The pension scheme trustees propose to address the shortfall by reducing the pensions paid to those currently working at the airports or Aer Lingus, together with cuts to the pensions of former employees currently working for other companies and cuts to pensions of those retired and receiving pensions under the scheme.

The strike could begin at the end of the month. However, the pension scheme trustees' chairman, Brian Duncan, has indicated he may intervene with new proposals to plug the pension scheme hole providing the union with an opportunity to avert industrial action.

Georgian miners give notice of strike

Miners working for the Rich Metal Group companies, RMG Gold and RMG Copper in Georgia gave 21 days' notice to strike in January. The miners are represented by the Trade Union of Metallurgy, Mining and Chemical Industry Workers of Georgia. The companies fired 140 employees, including 15 union activists in November last year after refusing to fulfil an agreement signed with the union.

Among the demands being put forward by the miners are for a doubling of their salaries from \$400 to \$800, improved working conditions and for the reinstatement of all RMG workers dismissed in 2013.

Hungarian chemical workers' strike continues

A hundred employees of the United Chemical Works Company (EVM) in Budapest have been on strike since February 3. They are members of the Federation of Chemical Workers of Hungary (VDSZ).

They began the strike in response to the company's plans to relocate from their Budapest site, leaving current staff with outstanding unpaid salaries. To prevent the company moving equipment out of the Budapest site, the workers are mounting a round the clock picket of the factory. The union planned a demonstration through Budapest on Wednesday in support of their demands.

Dutch workers bring flower giant to halt

Employees of the Dutch auction giant FloraHolland, which sells 20 million flowers and plants each day, have been on indefinite strike since Sunday. This follows a one-day warning strike on February 6. The several thousand staff employed by FloraHolland are organised by the unions CNV Dienstenbond and FNV Bondgenoten.

The action is in response to the failure of the unions to reach a new collective bargaining agreement with the company after it announced job losses and plans to relocate other staff.

Swiss airport workers cleared of criminal charges

In September last year workers employed at Geneva airport by Gate Gourmet, which supplies catering and other services to airlines, went on strike following the company's proposals to cut wages and benefits. As a result of the strike action, the company fired six of the employees and referred them to the Public Prosecutor on charges of trespass, riot, verbal abuse and personal injury.

The prosecutor examined the evidence, but on February 4 issued a statement saying it was not proceeding with the charges citing lack evidence. The Public Services Workers Union SSP has called for Gate Gourmet to reinstate the six workers and abide by the collective agreement it unilaterally terminated at the end of last year.

UK lecturers hold third two-hour strike

Lecturers, members of the University and College Union (UCU), held the third in a series of two hour strikes on Monday. The action is in pursuit of a 2013 pay claim still to be settled.

UK Royal Opera House staff win “living wage” award

Staff employed by MITIE, the outsourcing company at the Royal Opera House working as porters and cleaners, have been awarded a “living wage” pay offer of £8.80 (\$14.50) from April 1.

Middle East

Strike by Egyptian textile workers

Employees of the government-owned Weaving and Textile Company in the Nile Delta city of Mahalla went on strike Monday. The more than 10,000 day shift workers were joined by 2,000 night staff. Amongst their demands are for the government to pay a delayed bonus instalment from last year, for the implementation of a minimum wage of LE 1,200 and for the removal of Fouad Abdel-Alim who oversees public textile companies.

Israeli hospital workers protest continues

The strike by medical staff at the Hadassah Medical Centre in Jerusalem has entered its second week. They are striking in response to the government’s failure to finance the hospital which has debts of over a quarter of a million dollars. The Jerusalem District Court has issued a 90-day stay of proceeding to prevent creditors taking action against the hospital in the 90-day period.

Medical workers across Israel were due to take a two hour solidarity strike in support of the Hadassah staff.

Kuwaiti oil workers postpone planned action

A strike by 19,000 oil workers, members of the Kuwait Oil Workers Union, was due to begin this month. The action was in protest at the government owned Kuwait Petroleum Corporation’s plans to cut pay by refusing to reinstate a previously paid bonus scheme.

The union says it is postponing the strike till March because of National Day celebrations which are held in February.

Africa

Ongoing South African platinum miners’ strike

Talks between the three South African platinum producers, Amplats, Impala, and Lonmin and the mineworkers union AMCU were suspended on Wednesday with agreement no closer after three weeks of strike action. The negotiations were adjourned after a Commission for Conciliation,

Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) proposal was rejected by the platinum companies. The CCMA proposed a deal where wages in the sector would be brought up to AMCU’s demand of R12,500 over a three year period. The Commission said the process would continue but by consulting the parties separately.

The first death was reported on Friday of an AMCU shop steward shot by a member of the SA police force on his way to a picket line. Last week two miners were arrested and one injured when police disbursed 3,000 protesters.

Mali gold miners walk-out

Mineworkers at AngloGold Ashanti, Mali, a South African listed gold mining company, began a five day strike on Monday. The strikers at Sadiola and Yatela mines are demanding improved redundancy payments for laid off workers.

The company stopped mining at the Yatela mine and shelved plans for expansion at the Sadiola mine last year. The company says this in response to the price of gold falling from \$1920 an ounce to \$1275 an ounce and increased production costs. The Secretary General of the civil, engineering and energy labour confederation, Afousenyi Toure said that 70 percent of employees at Sadiola and 90 percent at Yatela had come out by noon on Monday.

Around 2,000 workers are employed at the two mines. The union is asking for 36 months’ salary and one million CFA francs (\$2100) for medical expenses for each laid-off worker. The company is offering two months and 10 days pay for each worker.

South African food production workers action continues

The strike at Unilever’s factory at Pietermaritzburg South Africa continued into its third week, with no resolution. More than 200 members of the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) are on strike demanding a wage increase and the scrapping a proposed two-tier wage system, bringing in new workers at a lower rate.

The union has offered to reduce its original wage claim of nine percent to eight percent if the company removes the dual pay threat. The company has refused to move on its seven percent pay offer. Katishi Masemola, FAWU Secretary General said the company was, “refusing to review this sort of grading that has seen new and younger workers employed at lower wages.”

Zimbabwean court orders miners’ arrears

President Robert Mugabe’s stepson, Russel Goreraza, has been ordered to pay miners working at his Tolrose mine in Kadoma around \$340,000 in unpaid salaries by the Zimbabwe courts. Some of the workers have not been paid since 2011.

The miners went on strike earlier in the month demanding their unpaid salaries, but this failed. Goreraza was taken to the labour court, but claimed he was above the law. While the court has ordered Goreraza to pay the arrears there is no guarantee this will happen.

South African health care workers strike

On Monday, 23 healthcare workers went on strike at Eesterust's Vukani Community Development Centre, in Tshwane, demanding outstanding monies.

More than 400 lay healthcare workers in Tshwane City have gone unpaid for the last five months, while others have been underpaid. The Department of Health has agreed to take over payments of R2500 (\$230) per month to health care workers composed of councillors, peer educators, and home based carers, who had previously been employed by NGOs.



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