

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

9 May 2014

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Europe

## Greek cleaning women protest outside Finance ministry

Female cleaners suspended from their jobs in various regions of the country have been holding an ongoing protest outside the Greek Finance ministry building in Athens for the past few months. Their jobs have been suspended since September last year but on May 18 they will be permanently laid off.

They have appealed to the PanHellenic Federation of Employees in Public Financial Services to step up support for them. They made an appeal for wider support: "We urge citizens, unions, women's organizations, young people, men of letters, arts and sciences, to join their voices with our own voice."

## Care staff in Doncaster, England continue their fight

Around 150 care staff employed by Doncaster UK began a two-week strike on Monday May 5. They are members of the Unison union and provide care to people with learning disabilities. UK Care wants to impose changes to their evening and weekend pay rates that employees say will cut their pay by up to one half.

The workers have conducted a determined fight to defend their conditions and have already held 20 days of strike action prior to the latest action.

Care UK is one of the leading providers of health and social services in the UK. Its portfolio includes management of hospitals, doctors' centres and care homes.

Desperate to come up with a formula they can sell to the membership, the Unison public sector union has held 13 full consultation meetings with the company since November last year. The latest talks last month, under the auspices of the government negotiation service ACAS, broke up without resolution.

## Energy workers employed by UK firm EDF strike over pay

Around 500 workers employed by the energy firm EDF held a strike Tuesday May 6 and Thursday May 8 over pay. They are demanding the

implementation of a pay agreement made in 2012 and protesting that a 2013 pay increase was below the inflation rate.

## Logistics workers in Finland in two-day action

Logistic workers at warehouses of companies including Keslog, Inex Partners, Tuko Logistics and Lidl held a two-day strike at the end of last week. They were protesting poor working conditions, long hours and low sick pay rates. The employers' organisation, the Finnish Commerce Federation, denounced the strike as illegal.

## French pilots' strike called off

A strike by the main pilots' union in France, Syndicat National des Pilotes de Ligne (SNPL), was called off at the last moment last week.

The pilots were protesting a law that would have made strikes illegal unless workers had given 48 hours' notice. The action was to have been held intermittently from May 3 to May 30, with pilots walking off the job sporadically.

But on Friday SNPL leader Yves Deshayes said the union had abandoned the strike after meeting with the Transport Ministry. While claiming that the government had recognised "that these practices were not acceptable," Deshayes said it had given "no guarantees."

## Dutch rail cleaning staff continue dispute

The strike by cleaning staff working for the Dutch Rail company (NS), which began last week, is ongoing. They are demanding a pay rise of 50 cents (\$0.70) an hour, and two days paid sick leave. NS responded to the strike by asking its office staff to volunteer to carry out cleaning duties.

Middle East

## Turkish May Day protesters in court

Turkish workers taking part in the May Day demonstration in Istanbul last week were arrested. Over the weekend around 170 of them were released without charge. However, a further 18 were sent to court.

Prosecutors demanded that one of them be arrested and held, but the court ruled they all be released on probation.

Police carried out savage measures to prevent the May Day marchers entering Taskim Square. They used tear gas and water cannon on several thousands of the marchers.

### **Iranian workers mark May Day**

Iranian workers marked May Day with protests and demonstrations. In Ahwaz employees of the Ahwaz Pipe Factory protested in front of the Governorate office against non-payment of wages going back several years. State security personnel surrounded the protestors.

In Sanandaj textile and bakery union members held protests. A massive security force presence in the main square of Qom prevented planned protests.

### **Marchers mark May Day in Tel Aviv**

More than 1,000 workers marched through Tel Aviv on May Day. Among the demands made by the marchers was for an increase in the minimum wage from its current level of NIS 23.12 (\$6.7) to NIS 30 (\$8.7). Currently the minimum wage in Israel is amongst the lowest in the western world.

Africa

### **Strike by South African dockworkers continues**

The strike by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) at South Africa's port operator, Transnet, is ongoing.

The action was called over the backbreaking conditions of employment. The workers are demanding more employees be taken on to share the load and are also protesting increased working hours for crane operators. The workers, who had previously worked for three hours before being able to take a break, now have to work five, which they say leaves them feeling dizzy. They are also opposed to agency workers being employed.

NUMSA represents just 20 percent of the workforce. The remainder of the workforce has been locked out by Transnet.

### **Action by South African tyre workers suspended**

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) has suspended its strike at Continental Tyres South Africa, which began April 15. The union says it has accepted changes in shift patterns and pay rates proposed by the company.

The company informed NUMSA that the new structure, involving a move from five shifts to four, would mean the elimination of 130 jobs. The company said it would likely reopen for production on Monday May 12, after outstanding issues had been resolved. Meanwhile the union is claiming payment of wages from the time the strike was suspended.

### **Nigerian health workers in Abeokuta walkout**

Medical workers, members of the Joint Health Sector Union JOHESU came out on indefinite strike at the Federal Medical Centre in Abeokuta, the capital of Ogun state in Nigeria on Monday. They are protesting the failure to implement an agreement on promotion, and the Chief Medical Director's disregard for workers' rights.

The hospital was deserted Tuesday with only a few management and doctors working. A worker told the press that management had refused to implement a Federal Ministry of Health circular calling on chief medical directors and medical directors to promote level 14 staff.

### **Nigerian aviation workers to walk out**

Nigerian aviation unions are planning a two-day warning strike against a government plan to merge the Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA), the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) and the Nigeria Meteorological Agency (NIMET) into one body. The planned merger has also been denounced by aviation stakeholders and professionals, which have described it as a retrogressive measure.

The three unions involved are the Air Transport Services Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (ATSSSAN), National Union of Air Transport Employees (NUATE) and National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers (NAAPE).

### **Sudanese doctors strike**

Doctors at the emergency department of Nyala Teaching Hospital in Darfur, Sudan came out on strike last Sunday to protest against constant attacks on medical staff and for better working conditions.

One doctor told the media, "We decided on the strike after a government troop accompanying a patient attacked a doctor inside the hospital. He hit him with a sharp tool, causing a deep head wound. This happened in front of policemen, who did not intervene." He added, "The strike will continue until the issue is resolved in a drastic way and the working environment has become safe again. The attacks by government troops are increasing, and the authorities do not take any action to protect the doctors and the hospital."



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