

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

16 May 2014

Public service strike in France

A one-day strike of public-service workers took place yesterday, involving up to 5.5 million employees. It caused severe disruption to government offices and transport.

The action was called to protest the Hollande Socialist Party government's attack on conditions of employment.

Many planes were cancelled or diverted as air traffic controllers were involved in the action. Schools were also closed.

French refuse workers on four-day walkout

Refuse workers across France began a four-day strike Monday. The 35,000 binmen, sweepers, drivers and operatives are organised by the General Confederation of Labour union (CGT). Among their demands are early retirement of between five and 10 years, a reduction in hours and improved working conditions. They marked the start of their strike by a demonstration at the foot of the Eiffel Tower.

Iceland pilots begin programme of action

Pilots working for the Icelandair airline began a programme of strike action last Friday when they held a 12-hour strike. Further strikes are due to take place May 16, 20 and, beginning May 30, another four-day strike. They are imposing an overtime ban during the course of the programme of strikes.

The pilots are members of the Icelandic Airline Pilots Association and voted with a 98 percent majority for the action in a ballot on April 29. Their previous contract expired last November and ongoing negotiations over pay and conditions have failed to reach agreement.

UK land registry staff strike

Around 3,000 staff employed at 14 government Land Registry offices across England and Wales held a 48-hour strike this week. They are members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union and are striking to oppose the partial privatisation of the service.

Norwegian oil service workers begin negotiations over pay

Unions representing 6,000 oil service workers, who service oil platforms and equipment, began negotiations this week over a substantial pay increase with employers including Haliburton. The Industry Energy union represents around 90 percent of oil service employees. Press reports are predicting failure in the talks, which would trigger a strike.

Turkish unions declare one-day strike over mine disaster

Unions including the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions, the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions, the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects and the Turkish Medical Association called a one-day strike Thursday 15 May following the deaths of over 270 coal miners in Turkey's worst mining disaster at Soma in western Turkey. Around 100 miners remained trapped with hope for their safe rescue diminishing.

Ahmet Faruk Unsal, president of Mazlumder, a Turkish human rights group spoke of poor work safety record in a press release: "Our relentless greed for profit, in competition with local and global capital, and the working conditions that follow, put the most basic human rights—even the right to life—at risk." He added that over 1,200 workers died in work-related incidents in Turkey last year and 360 had died in the first four months of this year.

Lebanese public-sector workers hold "Day of Anger"

Around 100,000 public sector workers, including teachers, held a

one-day strike on Wednesday. The “Day of Anger” has been organised by the Trade Union Coordination Committee (UCC). Their demands include higher wages and to protest the proposed cut of \$700 million to the public sector salary scale recently recommended by a parliamentary committee.

On Tuesday, staff employed by the publicly-owned power company EDL announced they would join the day of protest. However, production plant and switching station operatives were exempted.

Strike of South African platinum miners continues

The strike by platinum miners working for Lonmin, Anglo American Platinum and Impala Platinum is now four months long.

Following the collapse of talks between the companies and the union representing the strikers, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) last week, employers have been trying to deal directly with the workforce presenting them the latest pay offer. Their offer is for a maximum 10 percent pay increase that would raise the minimum pay package to R12,500 (\$1,200) by July 2017. AMCU’s demand had been for an immediate minimum pay hike to R12,500 (\$1,200).

AMCU president, Joseph Mathunjwa said AMCU will go to the labour court next week in an attempt to prevent the mining companies bypassing the union and dealing directly with the striking miners.

Protest over non-payment of wages by security staff at Namibia security firm

Namibian security guards, members of the Namibia Security Guards and Watchmen Union (NSGWU) working for Inter Africa Security Service held a protest demonstration outside the company’s gates this week. They were protesting non-payment of wages by the company over a several month period. Inter Africa Security Service, described as one of the top Namibian security companies, is alleged to have a record of abusive treatment of its workers.

A company spokesman, Ndinelago Amkuatah said they did not pay their employees if some of their clients had not paid. She went on to say the company takes no responsibility for the guards not being paid when clients do not pay, and this will continue in the future.

Even when some clients do pay where certain guards work it does not mean that guard will be paid, only when all the clients have paid will the employees get paid, she stated.

Nigerian bus makers sacked

This week 25 workers at Von Automobiles in Lagos were sacked for being absent from work in a protest over poor working conditions. Von Automobiles manufactures buses at a rejuvenated Volkswagen assembly plant. They were sacked for opposing the Von Company Policy Manual, which they say disregards workers’ rights.

They were seeking a yearly bonus, an annual pay increase and three warning notices to be given before dismissal. The workers are being backed by the Joint Action Front, an umbrella body incorporating the National Labour Congress.

Demonstration by Tanzanian teachers over unpaid salaries

On May 8, some 160 teachers redeployed to Mwanza City, Nyamagana District, Tanzania demonstrated outside the City Director’s Office demanding payment of unpaid salaries. Some of the teachers had not been able to afford basic accommodation and declared that they would sleep outside the director’s office until they are paid.

The teachers had also been told travelling expenses would be paid, but had only received a small amount of money on their arrival at their school workplace. This was on top of not receiving their pay for April.

Ludovic Fumagila, speaking for the teachers said, “If the city management is not in a position to solve our matter, let them give us official letters so that we can go back home.”

However City Director Danfold Kamenya said the teachers were here on a legal directive and he had no mandate to let them go back home.

Kenya flower farm strike

Around 600 workers at the Red Land Roses flower farm, Ruiru, Kenya went on strike last week, protesting poor working conditions. Most of the flower workers are paid SH6, 300, (\$72) a month. They are also demanding their employer honour an agreement over transport allowances. One worker said he had been hit with a metal bar over the head by a supervisor and suffered head injuries.

The farm workers are also demanding lunch breaks. They say they are overworked and cannot eat their packed lunch until 4pm. The police responded to the nonviolent strike by throwing teargas canisters at the workers, including some pregnant women.



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