

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Europe

## Police tear gas striking French rail workers

French rail workers began a strike last week opposing the proposed reunification of the train operator SNCF with rail infrastructure company RFF as a prelude to privatisation.

Several hundred rail workers, who held a protest on Tuesday on the Left Bank area adjacent to the National Assembly in Paris, were attacked by police with tear gas and batons. Some of them then marched to the Montparnasse station and on to the train tracks and set off flares.

On Wednesday, the CGT Cheminot union announced it would extend the strike by a further 24 hours, and there is speculation that it may continue into July.

## Greek university admin staff walkout

Administrative staff at the Technical School of Athens and the University of Patra began a 48-hour strike Thursday. It is in opposition to a government review, covering suspension/dismissal policy, which is leading to the destruction of thousands of public sector jobs.

In addition to the strike, the administrative staff occupied both sites.

## Greek hospital staff hold 24-hour protest

The Panhellenic Federation of Public Hospital Staff (POEDIN), and the Hospital Doctors Union Federation (OENGE) held a 24-hour nationwide protest on Wednesday, leaving hospitals with only a skeleton staff.

They are opposing the new staff evaluation system, which will lead to job losses. Under the evaluation scheme, a minimum of 15 percent of staff will be deemed below average and ultimately dismissed.

The health care staff point out that even though 15,000 of their colleagues have retired over the last four years, with a further 5,000 to retire this year, they are not being replaced.

## Irish rail workers to be balloted over pay cuts

The Irish national railway system operator, Ianrod Eireann, is pushing for an agreement to cut its pay bill by €4.7 million (US\$6.4million) as part of an overall €8.5 million (US\$11.5 million) savings plan.

It had been in talks with two unions. However, the National Bus and Rail Union withdrew and says it will ballot its members if the company imposes the cuts.

The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) remained in talks, and the company came up with a revised plan, reducing the time frame for the pay cuts and cutting the pay bill by the reduced figure of €3.5 million (US\$4.7 million). The union is balloting its members on this proposal with voting closing July 6.

## Pickets at Irish construction materials manufacturer

More than 300 workers employed by Roadstone Woods, which manufactures building materials for the construction industry, went on strike Monday and mounted pickets at 20 Roadstone Woods sites.

They are members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) and are protesting management plans to cut €10 million (US\$13.6 million) from the payroll over the next five years. The company imposed a €6 million (US\$8.1 million) cut in its payroll costs in 2012.

A SIPTU press release stated: "The pay cut which is currently proposed by management would take €20,000 [US\$27,000] from the lowest paid workers over the next five years."

## Irish refuse workers confronted by enforced pay cut

Workers employed at the Greyhound waste collection plant in Clondalkin near Dublin reporting for work on Tuesday were told to accept cuts to their wages and changes in conditions to enter the premises.

Some of the workers made two attempts to enter, saying they were doing so on the basis of their current terms of employment, but were refused access. The Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), which organises staff at the site and handles the waste from 110,000 Dublin households, said the proposed pay cuts were of the order of up to 35 percent.

The company sought and obtained an injunction preventing the locked-out workers blockading the site; however, they are able to picket the site.

## Strike at luxury Italian car manufacturer

Around 200 workers at the Fiat-Chrysler Maserati plant in Grugliasco in northern Italy went on strike Monday. They represent around 10 percent of the workforce and are members of the FIOM (Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici) union. They are protesting a number of issues including arrangements for summer leave and the stalling of contract negotiations.

### **Norwegian oil unions threaten walkout**

The SAFE and LEDERNE unions, representing oil platform workers employed at ExxonMobil and GDF Suez platforms off the Norwegian coast, were in last-ditch talks with management overseen by a government mediator.

The unions are seeking a pay increase, but the talks stalled on union demands for improved pension rights. The unions represent around 3,500 workers employed by the two companies. A midnight Tuesday deadline for the talks to end was extended to try and reach a settlement.

### **Swedish rail workers' strike ends**

The strike by more than 1,000 rail workers organised by the SEKO union ended Wednesday after union officials accepted the mediator's proposal. The workers are employed by Veolia in southern Sweden and began the action in response to the company's sacking of around 250 staff to reinstate them on worse conditions.

The settlement does not contain any limit on the use of temporary workers, one of the union's main demands. That didn't stop SEKO from calling it a "historic victory."

The walkout affected trains from southern Sweden to Denmark and the line between Malmo and Stockholm.

### **Spanish court rules against Coca Cola redundancies**

A Spanish court has ruled that its sacking of more than 800 workers in April by Coca Cola was illegal and has instructed the company to reemploy and reimburse them. The sacking came as a result of an efficiency drive by Coca Cola in which it closed four bottling plants in Madrid, Mallorca, Alicante and Asturias.

### **Workers at London care charity ballot over pay**

Around 40 social care workers employed by London-based charity Look Ahead are to be balloted over proposals by the organisation to cut their wages by 14 percent. They are members of the UNITE union. Balloting will take place until June 23.

The staff had been forced to accept pay cuts previously. A UNITE officer stated if the current pay cut proposal is forced through, it would mean a 30 percent cut over the last two years.

### **Glass workers in northeast England protest paltry pay rise**

Around 110 employees, working for Tyneside Safety Glass in the Gateshead area of Newcastle began a one-week strike on Monday. They are members of the UNITE union and are employed at two sites, Kingsway and 7th Avenue.

They rejected the company's three-year pay deal, with a 3 percent pay rise this year followed by 2 percent for the subsequent two years of the deal. According to UNITE, the deal had strings and was expected to be self-funding.

### **Rail workers on London Heathrow airport line strike**

Rail workers—members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union working on the London-to-Heathrow airport express line (HEX)—began a 24-hour strike on midday Thursday.

They are HEX's plans to make £6 million in cuts, which will hit jobs, pay and conditions.

Middle East

### **Striking garment workers in Bahrain face deportation**

Two thousand Indian and Bangladeshi garment workers employed at a garment manufacturing factory in Riffa are being threatened with deportation after going on strike. The factory makes garments for leading companies such as Macy's, The Gap and Walmart.

Amongst their demands are a pay rise, better food and medical care. The Labour Ministry proclaimed the strike illegal and threatened legal action including deportation if they did not end their action.

Africa

### **Possible settlement of South African platinum miners' dispute**

An agreement has been reached in principle on a possible settlement of the five-month old dispute between the Association of Miners and Construction Union (AMCU) and the three South African platinum producers.

Although there are several issues still to thrash out, there has been an agreement on a slightly improved pay offer.

The pay offer of the three platinum companies—Amplats, Impala and Lonmin—is over three years, increasing the basic wage by R1000 (US\$94) a month for the first two years and R950 (IS\$89) a month for the third year. The increase for miners, artisans and officials will be 8 percent for two years and 7.5 percent for the third year.

Living allowances have been kept separate, but are not changing from 2013 levels. No date has been set for a return to work as yet.

### **Sugar workers in Swaziland, Zambia and South Africa take action**

As the strike at the Illova Sugar Company in South Africa ended, workers at its Big Bend refinery in Swaziland have now walked out. They held an hour-and-a-half strike last week, demanding the immediate payment of a promised pay increase, which the union has been negotiating for some time.

Staff at the Tambankulu sugar estate in Swaziland, owned by Tongaat Hulett, are expected to strike imminently. Meanwhile, management at the Nanga Sugar Company, Mazabuka, Zambia, has sacked five top union officials, accusing them of inciting workers to strike, which they deny.

### **Zambian Labour Department workers strike threat**

Workers at the Department of Labour, Zambia, say they will go out on strike in two weeks to establish equal pay for equal work.

Members of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers are demanding the standardisation of salaries for labour inspectors, client service officers and unemployment insurance clerks.

Some labour inspectors at level six are doing the same work as others on level seven but are not getting the same pay.

### **Tanzanian lecturers take action**

More than 2,000 students were unable to sit for their exams as college lecturers went out on strike on June 16.

The strike at the University of Dodoma, Tanzania, originally affected the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. With 5,000 students, it is the largest in the university. Other colleges are now said to have joined the action.

The lecturers are demanding payment of their allowances accumulated over three years amounting to around N40 million (US\$24,000).

### **Strike by Imo state doctors in Nigeria**

Doctors in the Nigerian state of Imo were due to begin a three-day strike on Monday. They are represented by the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA).

The NMA is demanding 10 months' salary arrears to be paid to doctors at the State Specialist Hospital, Umuguma, that members be given adequate allowances when posted to other parts of the state and a resolution to outstanding grievances of the doctors at the Federal Medical Centre in Owerri. The NMA is also opposed to the privatisation of the state's specialist hospitals.



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