

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

27 June 2014

## Europe

### Strike of French air traffic controllers called off

The union representing French air traffic controllers called off their strike after two days Wednesday. It was planned to run for six days until Sunday. The strike was called off after the government recognised the “importance of investment in the sector”, according to the Unsa-ICNA union.

Belgian Air Traffic Control (ATC) began a two-hour strike at 6 p.m. Wednesday in protest over budget cuts, with further shutdowns over the following 24 hours planned. The biggest French controllers union, SNCTA, pulled out of the strike action at the last minute claiming to have won concessions from the government.

The strike was in protest at proposals to create a “Single European Sky”, which will lead to job losses, and was also demanding that more up-to-date equipment be installed.

### French rail strike to continue

A rail strike continued as the French National Assembly voted on Tuesday to merge the train operator SNCF and the track infrastructure company RFF in preparation for privatisation. Two of the unions involved in strike action opposing the plans have signed up to the proposals, but two other unions are continuing their action.

### French ferry workers strike

Ferry workers employed by SNCM, which runs ferries between France, Corsica and North Africa, began an indefinite strike Tuesday. The strike is in response to the government backing out of a rescue plan. The government, which holds 25 percent of shares, was proposing to fund the purchase of four new ferries in return for an agreement to cut 500 out of the current 2,600 jobs.

### Strike of French intermittent workers may shut Avignon festival

Around a quarter of a million intermittent workers are on strike in France. They work in the cultural sphere in television, film, theatre and festivals and under present French law are entitled to an unemployment system that pays them in between employment spells in short term projects. The Avignon Festival, due to take place between July 4 and July 27, is the biggest performing arts event in the world. However, the ongoing strike may lead to the festival’s cancellation.

### French food processing workers strike

Around 50 employees of Findus food’s factory in Boulogne-sur-Mer came out on indefinite strike this week. They are members of the CFDT trade union. They are seeking a 3 percent pay increase and payments of bonuses for cold truck drivers and shift premiums.

### Greek teachers lobby ministry

Secondary school teachers, members of the OLME union, protested

outside the Education Ministry in Athens on Monday. They were opposing the “mobility” scheme which leads to forced transfers and layoffs. A delegation was due to meet with Education Minister Andreas Loverdos (PASOK) later in the day.

### Finnish postal workers stage three-day strike

Around 300 drivers and terminal employees of Itella, the Finnish national postal carrier, began a three-day strike Tuesday. They work for the cargo arm of Itella Logistics and the strike is not expected to affect postal deliveries.

The workers are members of the transport union AKT and are opposing the compulsory re-deployment of 20 workers, which will result in a pay cut. The 20 originally worked as drivers for a separate transport company, which was taken over by Itella.

### Public transport strike by workers in Nuremberg, Germany

Public transport workers in Nuremberg held a one-day strike on Tuesday in pursuit of a pay increase. They are members of the Verdi union. Local services involving subway trains, trams and buses were affected.

### Italy’s Pompeii site closed in protest

Workers responsible for the upkeep and for the access of tourists to the historic site of the Pompeii ruins held a protest meeting Monday, delaying the entrance of tourists to the site for several hours. The dispute was over work schedules and the delay in payment of wages arrears.

### Strike of Irish construction material manufacturer enters second week

The strike by more than 300 workers employed by Roadstone Woods, which manufactures construction materials, has entered its second week. They belong to the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU). Workers are opposing the company’s plans to cut €10 million (US\$13.6 million) from the payroll over the next five years by reducing pay.

### Irish municipal workers in Dublin oppose pay cuts

Staff employed by South Dublin County Council went on strike Tuesday before their union, Impact, called off a planned strike yesterday and accepted talks at the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) next Monday.

The strike led to the closure of libraries and council offices. The majority of those striking are members of IMPACT, with a minority who are members of the SIPTU union. The council cut the pay of 13 employees, with plans to cut the pay of a further 150. It wants to remove acting-up payments, made to staff undertaking additional tasks on top of their normal role.

### Portuguese workers march in opposition to austerity

Several thousand workers marched in Lisbon last Saturday in a demonstration organised by Portugal’s biggest union, CGTP, to

oppose the austerity measures of the right-wing Social Democratic Party and People's Party coalition government. Marchers chanted, "Change the policies" and "Out with the government."

#### **UK journalists protest jailing Al Jazeera journalists in Egypt**

Hundreds of BBC and other journalists held a protest outside New Broadcasting House, London, Tuesday morning, including a one-minute's silence. It was to protest the long sentences handed down to three *Al Jazeera* journalists based in Egypt in a Cairo court on Monday. They were found guilty on trumped-up charges of conspiring with the Muslim Brotherhood to broadcast false news discrediting the military junta.

Journalists from the *Channel 4 News* television programme stood in silent protests with their mouths covered in black tape at the end of the broadcast of Monday night's news programme.

#### **UK customs and revenue staff hold nationwide rolling strike**

Government workers employed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs service (tax collection) began a rolling strike this week. They are members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS). Beginning on Monday, offices in Scotland and parts of Northern England were the first to take strike action. Offices throughout the rest of the country were due to take action on subsequent days.

They are striking in opposition to government plans to cut jobs, close offices and open up the service to privatisation.

#### **Hospital medical staff at English hospital set to strike**

Nearly 50 biomedical scientists working at Northampton General Hospital in southern England were due to begin industrial action Thursday. They are members of the union UNITE.

The action will comprise a ban on overtime working, out-of-hours working and boycotting the on-call system. It is in response to an ultimatum by the hospital management to sign up to a new pay agreement, or face the sack.

Under the new agreement the medical scientists would have to double the number of night shifts they have to work. Currently they do seven night shifts in 14 weeks. Management wants to double it to 14 days in 14 weeks. They also want to slash out-of-hours payments by 80 percent. Medical scientists are educated to at least university graduate level and many have undergone many years of post-graduate training, but only earn up to £35,000 (US\$59,000) a year.

#### **Strike of Turkish glass workers**

Around 6,000 glass workers employed by Siseecam at 10 of the company's factories throughout Turkey came out on strike at the end of last week. Their union is seeking a 23 percent pay increase. The company has offered around 12 percent. Siseecam is Turkey's leading glass producer.

### **Middle East**

#### **Iranian retired steel workers protest**

Last Sunday a group of retired steel workers, former employees of the Khuzestan Steel Company, held a demonstration outside the Iranian parliament. They were protesting not receiving company pensions for several months and called on the parliament to investigate the matter.

#### **Strike by civil servants in Gaza**

Some 40,000 civil servants of the former Gaza authority struck June 26. Following a recent agreement, the Hamas government in Gaza and

the Fatah controlled West Bank are to unite.

The new government angered civil servants on the Hamas payroll by declaring that it would vet them before paying their salaries, something that could take months.

#### **Yemeni oil exploration workers' strike**

Oil workers employed by the Norwegian owned DNO oil exploration company went on strike Sunday, leading to the company suspending production at some of its sites in Yemen. They are in dispute over their terms and conditions. The Yemeni government is hosting talks between the company and the unions.

### **Africa**

#### **Strike of Mozambican sugar workers**

Workers providing services to the sugar industry went on strike on June 19 against a 50 percent increase in working hours. Their employer, Unitrans, is a global company that supplies drivers, machine operators, mechanics and some field workers to the Tongaat Hulett, Xinavane sugar plantation and mill in Maputo Mozambique.

The strike is in response to the company increasing the working day from 8 to 12 hours in April, without a corresponding increase in pay. The workers have had three meetings with management without any progress.

#### **Swazi sugar workers strike**

Around 3,000 plantation workers at Ubombo Sugar, Swaziland, part of Illovo Sugar Company, have come out on strike for pay increases of between 10 and 14 percent. The company has offered 7 percent. One of the striking workers said, "We have learnt the lessons from our brothers in South Africa, at Marikana. We must fight injustice even at the cost of our lives."

Members of the Swaziland Agricultural Plantation Workers Union (SAPWU) are into their second week of action.

In addition, 1,000 sugar cane workers at Tambankulu Estates Swaziland, controlled by South African-based Tongaat Hulett, came out on strike June 12. Seven hundred protested at the company's administration offices, hoping to confront management over their demand for a 10 percent pay increase.

#### **Liberian health staff abandon hospital in fear of Ebola**

Health workers at the Redemption Hospital in New Kru, Liberia have discharged all patients and abandoned the hospital after one of their fellow nurses died from the Ebola virus. Seven people have died from the virus in Kru and the nurse, Esther Kesseley, died a few months after the health authorities declared the country clear. A nurse said that since the death of their colleague their lives were at risk. The nurses would not return to work until the hospital is sprayed, and would continue with their non-cooperative action until they were provided with the protective materials necessary.



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