

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

18 July 2014

Further protests by Bulgarian road construction workers

Road construction builders employed by Avtomagistrali-Tcherno (Black Sea Highways) held a further demonstration this week—the third in two weeks. They blockaded several major roads for about half-an-hour on Tuesday. The protests are against the non-payment of wages in April and May. The company blames the Road Infrastructure Agency for not passing on funds to enable them to pay the wages. A letter has been sent to government ministers by the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB) urging resolution of the matter.

Greek bus drivers walk out in Thessaloniki

Bus drivers employed by the local public bus company, OASTH, in Thessaloniki, Greece began an indefinite strike Monday to protest non-payment of their wages. A spokesman for the drivers, Dimitris Tsermenidis told reporters that the company is owed around €130 million by the Greek government and none of them have been paid for more than six weeks.

UK catalogue workers plan one-week strike

Around 1,000 staff employed by Argos will begin a one-week strike on Saturday. Under the Argos business model, shoppers buy goods using a catalogue within the shop. The strike of distribution staff employed by Argos will hit the launch of its new catalogue.

The workers, members of the Unite trade union, are striking to oppose the attempts of Argos management to impose changes in terms and conditions, which would mean further weekend working. Unite had previously agreed to changes that led to increased weekend working. Argos employees have already held 24-hour strikes over the issue on June 15 and July 4.

The internal distribution centres are located at Basildon, Bridgewater, Castleford, Lutterworth in Leicestershire and Heywood in Greater Manchester.

Irish Roadstone company workers end action

More than 300 staff at the Roadstone Woods company, which

manufactures construction materials, ended their three-week strike at the end of last week after a Labour Court ruling. They are members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU).

They had taken the action following the company's cutting of their agreed bonuses. The agreement was to restore the bonus but only over a period of years, with the full bonus being restored in 2017.

Irish medical products staff reject pay offer

The 440 employees of US-owned Covidien at their Athlone unit have rejected a Labour Court recommendation which would have given them a 4.5 percent increase over three years.

The unit manufacturers plastic airway products used in surgery and procedures. The court also recommended 22 days leave for staff with 15 or more years of service. The staff, who are members of Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), were seeking a €1 hour increase and 25 days leave for those with 15 or more years' service. Most of the operatives are currently on €11.67 an hour.

In the Labour Court hearing, SIPTU representatives stressed that there had been prolonged industrial peace at the site.

Covidien is a global company with a US\$10 billion turnover last year. It has 38,000 employees in 70 countries.

Possible walkout of Italian oil and gas workers

Various unions involved in the Italian oil and gas industry, including the chemical workers' division of the General Labour Union are due to meet today to discuss the possibility of a strike within the oil and gas industry.

The meeting is in response to an announcement by Claudio Descalzi, the CEO of ENI, a Rome based multinational oil and gas company, that several oil refineries within Italy are likely to close.

The Italian government has a 30 percent stake in ENI, which operates in nearly 80 countries and is reportedly Italy's largest industrial company.

Refineries most likely slated for closure include Gela in Sicily, Taranto in Puglia and Livorno in Tuscany. Together they employ 1,500 people and represent 40 percent of the company's refining capacity.

Serbian general strike begins

Nineteen unions, members of the Confederation of Autonomous Trade

Unions of Serbia (SSSS) and the United Branch Unions (UGS) announced a general strike due to start Thursday.

The strike is in opposition to changes in labour law, pensions and disability rights of workers proposed by the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). Opponents to the changes say they will mean wage cuts of more than 20 percent, in both the private and public sector, the lowering of the minimum wage and permit the dismissal of staff that are disabled or become pregnant.

Long-running strike of Kuwaiti public workers set to end

A three-week long strike by staff in the Public Institution for Social Security in Kuwait is set to end as the department has agreed to their demand for a pay increase.

The strike shut down the department and nearly a half-million transactions had to be suspended.

Tunisian students continue hunger strike

Six Tunisian students, members of the Tunisian General Students' Union (UGET) are continuing their hunger strike according to reports at the end of last week. Ayoub Amara and Walid Azouzi began their hunger strike on June 16 and were joined by four more students on July 4. They are protesting discriminatory public sector hiring policies.

UGET says its members, who were arrested under the previous regime of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, are routinely denied public sector jobs. This is despite a decree of February 2011 supposedly pardoning those imprisoned on charges that were judged politically motivated under the Ben Ali regime.

Thouraya Krishen, a UGET member told the press: "We have communicated our demands to the government, the Presidency...but we have not received an answer...Ayoub Amara is on the verge of death, but the government still takes no notice. The revolution started because of [frustration over] unemployment."

South African metal workers strike continues

The strike by the South African National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) continued into its third week against a recomposed Metal and Engineering Industries Bargaining Council, MEIBC.

On Tuesday, the Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of Southern Africa (SEIFSA) withdrew its offer to raise pay by 10 percent in the first year, 9.5 percent in the second and 9 percent in the third and rejoined MEIBC after NUMSA rejected their offer on July 13.

SEIFSA is relying on the MEIBC to bring all parties around to a meeting in an attempt to end the strike.

Nissan which produces around 220 cars a day at its Rosslyn site halted production alongside Toyota and Ford as auto parts production dried up as a result of the strike. NUMSA said it planned to widen the strike by calling on 140,000 members in other industries around the country to join them.

South African bus workers take unofficial action

Bus operators in Tshwane, South Africa went out on unofficial strike action Tuesday in response to the bus operators farming out incoming automatic ticket operations on a 12-year contract to a service provider.

Fearing that the implementation of the contract in November this year represents a threat to their jobs, the 63 bus operators went on strike.

The bus workers are members of the South African Municipal Workers Union which is expected to instruct its members to return to work.

The Tshwane Bus Service (TBS) management threatened workers saying: "We can't allow a few people to embark on action that impact negatively on the city's bus commuters."

Protest strike of Ghanaian rail workers

The Accra railway workers union carried out a protest strike on July 14 and have threatened to strike indefinitely from July 21 if their demands are not met. They are demanding the implementation of a 2012 wage review which awarded them a 25 percent wage increase on poverty wages. The union's general secretary stated that wages are so low the rail workers are unable to feed themselves and their families.

Other demands included the upgrading of the rail system, and the issue of backbreaking work because of the lack of rail carts and tools for line maintenance.

The wage review covered many other sections of Ghana's workers. Earlier this year, nurses and workers in education were among other government employees who took action calling for its implementation.

Namibian miners set to strike

Fourteen hundred members of the Miners Union of Namibia, out of a 1,700 workforce are set to strike at Namdeb Diamond Corporation today if their demands are not met.

They demand a 15 percent pay rise with improved medical and education benefits, while the corporation is offering 7.5 to 8.5 percent, while inflation is running at 6.1 percent.

The diamond workers cannot afford expensive medical aid and the charges at the company school. Namibia is the largest producer of marine diamonds and are regarded the highest quality in the world.

Nigerian judicial staff strike

Members of the Judicial Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) went out on strike July 11 in response to the judgement of implementation of the separation of state powers. Currently, the federal government and state governments control judicial funding, which undermines the constitution which states there must be separation of judicial and legislative branches of the government.

JUSUN instructed its members to go on strike at state level across the country for its demand, among others, of the autonomous funding of the judiciary at state and federal level.

The union threatens to pull judiciary staff out at federal level if the court

ruling is not abided by.

Zambian rail workers protest unpaid wages

Members of the TAZARA Workers Union of Zambia held an angry protest on July 11 in response to four months unpaid wages. The Tanzanian Zambian Railway Company (TAZARA) offered to pay the railway workers two of the four months wages owed but the workers demanded the four months arrears.

The workers are paid in dollars and previously were paid at a favourable exchange. It would be paid at the best exchange rate between the delayed payment times. The company refused to continue with this method and the pay slips revealed their wages were being paid at unfavourable rates.

The company called in the police in response to the workers' protest.

Namibian hospital staff in dispute

Nurses at the Katutura Intermediate Hospital, Namibia demonstrated outside the medical superintendent's office on July 11 demanding overtime payments that are unpaid since January. Overtime was being imposed on nurses through staff shortages at the hospital. Nurses have to work double shifts as the shortages are so acute.

One nurse shouted, "We do not leave our children at home to work for free." Last week, assistant pharmacists were in dispute at the hospital with the Ministry of Health and Social Services over payment for comparable work. They claim that they do most of the work that qualified pharmacists do but do not get financial compensation.



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