

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

20 February 2015

Walkout of French airport staff

Staff at the Charles de Gaulle Airport, Paris, began a 24-hour strike at noon on February 12. Employees of ADP, which manages Charles de Gaulle Airport along with the two other Parisian airports, held the strike in protest of a pay freeze. They are represented by various unions, including the CGT. The action led to the cancellation of about 20 percent of scheduled flights.

Workers are angry that a pay freeze has been imposed in spite of ADP making big profits this year. According to the CGT, the company made a net profit of over €358. The union says 60 percent of the profit will go to shareholders.

German airport security staff win pay increase

Following a strike last week at three airports, German airport security staff received a 13 percent wage increase. Their strike led to flight cancellations and police had to be drafted due to the build-up of passengers at the airports. The workers are members of the Verdi trade union. Previously, most of them were only earning the federal minimum wage of between €8.50 and €9 an hour.

March and rally of Irish childcare workers

Around 2,000 childcare workers demonstrated outside the Dail, the Irish government building, on Tuesday. The march and rally were organised by the Association of Childhood Professionals and was attended by the trade unions Impact, SIPTU, as well as the child welfare charity Barnardos and other bodies.

Among their demands was the introduction of a national pay scale and increased training and development opportunities. Around 25,000 currently work in the childcare sector, many on as little as €9.50 an hour. The association chair, Marian Quinn, told the press: "We're saying that a qualified, experienced person should be coming in on around €25,000 a year and upwards on a pay scale."

Dutch retail staff oppose wage cuts

Staff at the Dutch V&D department stores are opposing attempts by the company to cut their wages. V&D runs 63 branches across the Netherlands and is owned by the American private equity firm Sun Capital Partners. Sun Capital has a reputation for buying up companies for cash and then using the assets to leverage debt.

V&D management wants to cut staff pay by an average of 6 percent, with some workers facing a cut of 10 percent. The union representing the workers has put forward a proposal for a 2 percent pay cut.

Firefighters in England to strike

Firefighters in England, members of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), are due to hold a 24-hour strike on February 24. It will be the 66th such action in their long-running dispute over government plans to raise the age at which firefighters are able to retire. The workers are also fighting plans to decrease their pension payments, while increasing the contributions they have to pay in.

Firefighters in Wales and Scotland will not be taking part in the action. Their trade union representatives are currently in negotiations with their respective devolved governments. Firefighters in Northern Ireland have ended their dispute after agreement was reached on a lower retirement age than originally put forward.

The main concern of firefighters is that with an increased retirement age, many will fail the obligatory fitness tests for anyone over the age of 55 and so have to leave work before eligible for their pension.

The FBU accused the coalition government Fire Minister Penny Mordaunt of giving misleading assurances over what will happen to the pensions of those firefighters failing the fitness test.

Israeli bromine workers strike continues

Workers at the Israel Chemical (ICL) bromine plant are continuing their two-week strike. They are opposing plans by ICL to make 140 of the 900 staff at the Bromine plant redundant.

The Histadrut labour federation threatened to extend the strike this week by calling out workers at the ICL Dead Sea Works, which produces potash that is exported to China, India and Europe. The Dead Sea plant is one of the three largest suppliers of potash in the world.

ICL is seeking to restructure its operation through job cuts and relocation of some jobs abroad in an attempt to boost its profits.

Malawi teachers march for back wages

Walkout threat at Israeli supermarket chain

The Histadrut labour federation is threatening strike action if the Mega supermarket chain goes ahead with planned store closures and job losses. Mega, once Israeli's second-largest supermarket chain, is facing competition from lower-priced competitors. Histadrut said it will call out Mega's 6,500 employees if it pushes ahead with closure plans.

Earlier reports talked about 10 stores closing with the loss of 65 jobs but the company states it is seeking to close five stores.

Iranian sugar workers hold protest over closed refinery

Last Saturday, workers gathered outside the closed sugar refinery in the city of Varamin. The recent closure threw the workforce of 400 out of work. Many of them are owed wages. Over 150 of the staff have been employed at the refinery for over 20 years.

Some of the older workers should be able to retire under the hard and hazardous jobs legislation but are not able to do so because the company failed to pay their insurance contribution payments for the last two years.

South African bus drivers continue action

The wildcat strike by bus drivers in South Africa that began on February 2 over working conditions and union rights has entered its third week. The SA Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) reports the Congress of South African Trade Unions will act as a mediator between the union and the bus company. In Cape Town, where the bus drivers are striking against MyCiTi, the company claims it is able to run a normal service using non-striking drivers.

South African bus workers in Johannesburg sacked for striking

On Sunday, the Piotrans Rea Vaya bus rapid transport service in Johannesburg sacked 158 bus workers who had begun a wildcat strike on February 2. The 158 workers were sacked in their absence. One of the workers' demands is to bring the bus system back under public ownership.

The South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) said they were opposed to the 158 sackings.

The company claims bus drivers abandoned their busses throughout the city, breaching company regulations, and regarded it a sackable offence.

Bus service is suspended while the strike continues.

Malawi teachers recently recruited to secondary schools marched on parliament on Monday, demanding six months of unpaid wages. The teachers took their case to the Teachers Union of Malawi, to the education ministry and other authorities without any success.

Out of 957 teachers recruited since September 2014, 500 have quit their jobs. The teachers presented a five-point petition to parliament. Amongst their demands were payment of the six months arrears, regular payments and the resignation of the education minister.

Namibian miners strike for pay demands

Nearly 200 miners at the B&E International mine in Oranjemund and Luderitz, Namibia, began a strike Monday to demand a 12 to 20 percent wage increase in basic pay, medical aid, transport allowance and a bonus. The company offered a 15 percent pay increase and N\$300 (US\$27) medical aid. The representative of the Namibian Union of Mineworkers said the company was attempting to sow divisions among the workers by offering individual deals within the bargaining unit and bribes to workers to renounce their right to strike.

Togo students demonstrate in support of teachers

The government of Togo shut down the school system on February 17 in response to student demonstrations demanding the government pay their teachers.

Students demonstrated in the capital city Lome calling on the authorities to meet the teachers' demands so they could return to their education. The government said it shut the schools down to avoid the demonstrations endangering the security and lives of pupils, their teachers and the population. Strikes and walkouts have been taking place across the country in health and education demanding wage increases for workers throughout the 50,000-member civil service.



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