

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

15 May 2015

Europe

German insurance staff walk out

Insurance workers in the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg walked out on strike Tuesday. Their colleagues in the rest of Germany came out over the next few days. They are members of the union Verdi, which represents 174,000 insurance employees, and are seeking a 5.5 percent pay increase. Further pay negotiations between the union and employers' representatives are due May 22.

Berlin ATMs run out of money as courier strike bites

Couriers responsible for replenishing ATM machines in the German capital, Berlin, have been on strike for three weeks. They are employed by security firm Prosegur. Members of the Verdi union, they are seeking a one-euro-an-hour pay increase as well as higher insurance pay-outs for injuries sustained in the course of their work. Their prolonged action has meant ATMs are now running low on money.

Iceland beset by industrial disputes

Strikes by groups of Icelandic workers have been ongoing since April. Those involved are members of the Iceland Association of Academics, which includes hospital staff, ministerial staff, veterinarians and food scientists. The strike by vets is having a major impact on the food industry, with reports of the threat of a meat shortage. As part of their role, vets are required to monitor welfare conditions in slaughterhouses and approve imported meat before it can be processed.

Other groups of workers, including journalists and nurses, are due to strike later in May. Action is also expected by unions organised in the umbrella organisations Bay Alliance and the Labour Union.

According to the news web site *Iceland Review*, by the beginning of next month more than 70,000 workers, around 40 percent of the workforce, could be out on strike, making it the biggest action to hit the country in decades.

Irish retail staff win pay rise, but vow to continue struggle

Around 6,000 staff working for the Irish retail chain store Dunnes held a one-day strike in April. Among their demands was a pay rise, but their main concerns were job security and working hours. Dunnes announced this week during an internal "communication meeting" that it would give its staff a 3 percent pay increase, but did not address the concern over working hours and job security.

Dunnes had previously only issued work rosters on a weekly basis but will now issue them on a four-week basis, giving staff more notice.

A planned march and rally in Dublin of Dunnes staff and supporters will go ahead June 6.

Strike by Swedish air pilots announced

Swedish pilots working for Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) announced last week that they will come out on strike May 21. This follows a breakdown in talks between SAS and the pilots' union, SPF. SAS is trying to impose greater flexibility on its staff in an attempt to cut costs.

SAS is still negotiating with its Norwegian pilots. It is seeking to sign contracts similar to the one signed with its Danish pilots back in March accepting the greater flexibility.

Ukrainian coal company workers blockade road

The PSJE Lviv Coal Company employs around 900 staff, and the Ukrainian government has a 37.6 percent share. On Wednesday, Lviv workers supported by the Independent Trade Union of Miners of Ukraine blocked Lviv-Rava-Ruska main highway in a protest over unpaid wages.

Previously, the company had promised to pay salary arrears up to May 9, but did not do so. Lviv employees have had to take similar action in the past over unpaid wages.

UK rail staff vote for action

Rail workers employed by Network Rail, which is responsible for track and signalling on the rail system, have voted for strike action. In a ballot conducted by the Rail and Maritime Transport union (RMT), 80 percent of a 60 percent turnout voted for a strike action. They are opposed to the pay offer made by Network Rail, which was for a one-off £500 bonus payment but no percentage rise this year, followed by increases limited to the RPI inflation index till 2019.

The Transport Salaried Staffs' Association, which represents white-collar staff employed by Network Rail, are currently balloting on action. No date has been set by the RMT for any proposed action, and General Secretary Mick Cash implored the employer "to come back to the table with an improved package."

A strike by Network Rail staff would have a countrywide impact on services. The last time such action was taken, it led to the cancellation of over 60 percent of train journeys.

Refuse workers in London borough set to walk out

Refuse lorry drivers in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham were set to strike from May 13 to May 25, followed by further strike action from May 30 to June 7. They are members of the GMB union. The action follows an effective pay cut by the local authority (LA) employer, leaving the drivers around £1,000 a year worse off.

The drivers had been involved in previous action over the same issue. They had been joined by drivers in the Unite and Unison unions, but they are not taking part in the current action. Unite and Unison signed deals with the LA.

University staff in London vote to oppose job cuts

Around two thirds of teaching and support staff at London Metropolitan University, members of the University and College Union (UCU), have voted to strike over proposals to cut 165 jobs. Members of the Unison union are currently balloting over the issue, with the result expected at the end of May.

Middle East

Egyptian journalists sign up for action

A petition calling for strike action initiated by the Journalists Syndicate has attracted more than 300 signatures. They are demanding a pay increase and enhanced social and economic rights. The strike is set to take place on June 10.

Israeli chemical workers' dispute continues

The three-month strike by Israeli Chemicals Limited (ICL) employees at their Dead Sea Works and the Bromine plant in southern Israel is continuing. It is in response to ICL proposals to impose big jobs cuts. The strike is beginning to have an impact on the company's revenue, with sales in the first quarter of this year down by 13 percent.

Southern Israel depends on the company for its economic survival. The mayor of Dimona has declared a shutdown of the town, including schools, this coming Sunday in a show of support for the striking workers. A major rally in their support has also been arranged. Around 20 percent of Dimona's population are employed by ICL or tied to its activities.

Strike by civil servants in Gaza Strip

Civil servants in ministries and public institutions across the Gaza Strip went on strike Tuesday. Schools were exempted, as public exams are currently being sat. The 50,000 civil servants employed in Gaza when Hamas came to power in 2007 have not been paid on a regular basis since the Unity government with Fatah came to power just under a year ago.

They also accuse the Unity government of not making any effort to resolve the matter. The 50,000 civil servants in Gaza were appointed when Hamas took power in 2007, and the 70,000 civil servants appointed by the Palestinian Authority (PA) were forced out. However, the former PA civil servants continued to receive their salaries from the PA. The Unity government is pledged to restoring the former 70,000 employees of the PA to their former positions.

Of the 50,000 civil servants set on by Hamas, only around a half have received a one-off \$1,200 payment in October, but the rest have not received any salary since the forming of the Unity government in June of last year.

Africa

South African metal workers strike over job cuts

Three-hundred workers at the Alstom Electrical Company, in the South African city of Germiston, are taking part in an eight-day unprotected strike against the threat of 100 redundancies at the plant. They are members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). This week, 1,000 workers at the sister plants in Benoni and Wadeville joined the strike in sympathy action.

South African union calls on employer to resolve dispute

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) has called on the power company Eskom to settle the contractors' dispute at the Medupi construction site, where a new power station is being built. NUMSA and four other unions representing workers on the site are concerned they may be losing control of the seven-month ongoing dispute.

The striking workers have created a 20-man committee to take forward their demands, which now include a protest against the eviction from their hostels. Their original demands are over contracts for long-term employment, hostel accommodation, living-out allowances and end-of-contract bonuses paid only to management.

Residents blockade South African platinum mine

Residents living near the Bokoni platinum mine in the South African province of Limpopo began a blockade of the mine on Monday, bringing production to a halt. Their action has blocked the road between Polokwane and Burgersfort. The protest is in response to the failure of the company to invest the promised millions of Rand in the community when it was given mining rights eight years ago.

On Tuesday night, police brought in to control the protest were responsible for the shooting death of one of the protesters and for injuring another.

Nigerian local government staff dispute enters third month

Nigerian local government workers employed in 19 of the 25 councils making up Delta state have been on indefinite strike since March 11. They came out on strike after not being paid for four months.

Namibian flour mill workers' strike

Around 200 flour mill workers at Namib Mills went on strike Monday, demanding four managers be sacked and accusing them of racism and arrogance. The mill is Namibia's leading producer of pasta, flour and animal feed.

A Namibian National Labour Organisation shop steward said the continued presence of the four managers would affect production and could lead to further action.



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