

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

5 June 2015

Deutsche Post rejects union concessions on pay

Deutsche Post rejected an offer from the Verdi trade union Tuesday to scrap a demand for higher pay for postal workers in a dispute over pay and conditions that has led to a series of strikes.

Postal staff took action after Deutsche Post announced plans in January to create 10,000 new jobs at its parcel business by 2020. New workers would have to accept lower wages than senior employees to allow the express division to compete with rivals such as UPS and TNT.

Verdi said the move breached an agreement limiting how much business Deutsche Post can outsource. It wants reduced hours for 140,000 employees and a 5.5 percent rise in wages.

Thousands of German kindergarten workers protest

Thousands of kindergarten (KITA) employees from across Germany converged on Düsseldorf Tuesday to push for higher wages.

The unions are demanding a higher classification for kindergarten educators and staff, which they claim would result in a 10 percent pay rise.

The strike is in its third week and began after unsuccessful talks between the Verdi (United Services Union) and VKA (The Union of Local Government Employers' Associations) unions and employers.

Striking National Gallery staff stage demonstrate in London

A protest took place in central London Saturday against plans to privatise parts of the National Gallery.

National Gallery workers are involved in a 10-day strike. There have been 24 days of strikes since February, but the current action is the longest.

As well as opposing privatisation, the action is aimed against the dismissal of a gallery staff member and union rep who is accused of sharing information about the use of a private security firm. More than 21,000 people have signed a petition calling for the dismissed employee to be reinstated.

The demonstration in Trafalgar Square, just yards away from the National Gallery, was also attended by various artists.

UK steel workers vote for first national strike in 30 years

UK steel workers employed by Tata Steel have voted almost 9-1 to strike in a dispute over pensions. Changes to the British Steel Pension Scheme would see workers retiring at 65 instead of 60. The company warned that the pension scheme is heading for a £2 billion shortfall.

Members of the Community union backed strike action by 88 percent and other forms of action by 96 percent in a turnout of 76 percent. More than 6,000 union members were balloted.

If a strike goes ahead, it will be the first national walkout of steel workers in more than 30 years. Before the result was announced, the chief executive of Tata Steel's European operations, Karl Koehler, sent an open letter to workers urging them not to support industrial action.

The Indian-owned corporation owns UK steel plants once operated by the formerly nationalised British Steel.

UK rail engineers in ballot for industrial action

The Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union (RMT) said Wednesday that it will ballot more than 200 Engineering Grade members on Southern Rail's train operations for industrial action over a "comprehensive breakdown in industrial relations" with the company.

Staff are also seeking a commitment from Southern to reduce the working week from 39 hours to 35 hours.

Also in dispute is a recently initiated project called LEAN, which has "been brought in by consultants who have been surveying working practices at the engineering depots," said the RMT. It said the LEAN project is putting Engineering Grade members under increased pressure to work faster to meet the set times for specific tasks.

The union's main gripe is being left out of the loop as "Southern unilaterally introduced the LEAN project without any consultation taking place." The RMT said it "remains available for talks" with management.

London Metropolitan University staff to strike over job cuts

Over 250 staff members—including course administrators and librarians—working at London Metropolitan University (LMU) were set to strike for 24 hours on June 4. They are protesting the university's plan for redundancies being imposed after its recent financial crisis.

The staff, mainly members of the Unison union, will be joined by members of the University and College Union, who will be taking a second day of industrial action.

LMU proposed the 165 job cuts, claiming that costs needed to be reduced after student numbers fell substantially for the second consecutive year. Both academic and support worker posts are threatened.

Spanish baggage handlers for Ryanair flights stage indefinite strike

Workers who handle checked luggage on flights for Ryanair, Europe's largest budget carrier, are on an indefinite strike this week at Madrid's main international airport. They are in a dispute over pay and working conditions and are protesting alleged abuse and threats from airline management.

The walkout at the start of a busy tourist season affects all Ryanair flights in and out of the Spanish capital. Passengers on those flights are only allowed to bring hand-carried luggage with them.

Ground crew at the airport, one of the busiest in Europe, are striking to oppose cuts to their pay of up to 30 percent in addition to concerns about changes to shifts, annual leave and safety equipment. One issue is the company's intention to reduce the number of baggage staff to just two per aircraft, which workers say will cause delays, as they will be unable to unload and reload an aircraft in the time allowed.

Ryanair is seeking to take legal action against the strike, which they described as "illegal," claiming it did not provide for "the agreed minimum level of service." Last week, Ryanair forecast a 10 percent rise in profits and passenger numbers in its current financial year. It announced that net profits rose by 66 percent to £614 million last year.

Portuguese nurses hold 48-hour strike

Nurses in Portugal announced a 48-hour strike this week over pay and conditions.

On Monday, the Portuguese Nurses' Union said the walkout was a further protest against a 2013 increase in their working week from 35 to 40 hours, a reduction in overtime pay and a freeze on promotions.

The strike "is expected to cause widespread disruption to the country's national health service," according to Associated Press.

The measures, imposed by the government, are part of austerity policies required in return for a €78 billion (US\$85 billion) in loans from the euro zone and International Monetary Fund.

Irish hospital nurses and midwives serve notice of industrial action

The Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) has called a work to rule to begin June 10 at Beaumont Hospital. The union is protesting what it claims are unsafe conditions in the Emergency Department for patients and staff.

During the work to rule, all essential care required by patients will continue to be provided.

The local *North County Leader* reported, "Members of the INMO had agreed to defer industrial action earlier this year following agreement reached at the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) in respect of increased staffing and measures to address overcrowding. However, according to the INMO, management have failed to honour these commitments."

Child care professionals in Ireland plan to protest on June 6 against low pay.

Around 25,000 workers are employed in the sector, and the average wages range from €10.10 per hour for unqualified staff to €11.24 for graduates, according to Early Childhood Ireland.

The rallies, planned for Cork, Dublin and Sligo, coincide with the finalising of a report by an interdepartmental working group into the child care sector, believed to contain recommendations on extending the state's subsidised after-school child care scheme and providing paid paternity leave.

The *Irish Examiner Reporter* reported, "The Association of Childhood Professionals, which is organising the rallies, said it wants to see the issue of fair pay on election manifestoes and any future Programme for Government."

Association chair Marian Quinn said many workers in the early childhood education and care sector were "earning little more than the minimum wage" while many owner-practitioners were "struggling to take a wage themselves."

A survey of the sector by Early Childhood Ireland in 2013 found a professional early years educator, working 15 hours per week at £10 per hour for a 38-week year, earns €5,700 per annum.

Dunnes Stores workers and supporters protest in Sligo, Ireland

Workers employed at Dunnes Stores and their supporters gathered at the Cranmore Road store following a march in the town of Sligo, Ireland, last Friday.

Following the march, organised by the Mandate trade union, a petition was delivered to management. The *Sligo Champion* said, "The union is calling for the implementation of banded hour contracts, a review of temporary contracts of employment, individual and collective representational rights and what it calls fair pay for all workers."

The event followed a national one-day strike on April 2.

Iceland trade unions head off strikes involving 70,000 workers

On May 29, five Icelandic trade unions signed collective agreements, heading off strikes potentially involving 70,000 members.

The *Iceland Monitor* reported, "Negotiations are still, however, incomplete for some 40,000 union members across the public and private sectors in Iceland."

Academics, health care staff and vets have been on strike since early April for a rise in wage levels. Negotiations are currently at a standstill.

A strike by around 2,100 nurses began May 27. Talks aimed at settling the dispute collapsed on May 29, despite general agreement on a new starting wage for nurses of ISK 359,000 (approximately €2,430).

A group of six unions representing an estimated 10,000 marine engineers, metal technicians, construction and industrial workers, electricians, printers and hairdressers are voting on whether to come out on strike firstly on June 10-16, then indefinitely from August 24.

Staff at the Financial Management Authority (FJS) are to down tools indefinitely this week. Artisans' unions have voted 75.1 percent in favour of going on strike.

Turkish health care workers stage strike over shooting of doctor

Doctors in Turkey are staging a one-day strike this week to highlight violence against physicians after a gunman shot a medic dead last Friday.

Dr. Kamil Furtun died of a gunshot fired in a hospital on May 29 in the northern province of Samsun by a 30-year-old man, who claimed to have psychological problems.

Alper Alici, the head of the Istanbul branch of the Turkish Health Union said, "Health employees working in Turkey are worried about their safety. We repeatedly warned the authorities about the violence targeting doctors, but they continued to underestimate it and refused to take any strict measures."

According to statistics cited in the *Daily Sabah*, "over 31,000 acts of violence were reported against medical staff between 2012 and 2015. Doctors suffered most from the violence, with the majority of incidents being verbal assaults, while 14,250 incidents involved physical violence. Four doctors have been killed at hospitals in the past 10 years."

Some trade unions have called for the implementation of harsh new regulations, banning those involved in acts of violence toward medical staff from social security benefits for six months.

Turkey: "Terror investigation" launched against striking auto workers

A "terror investigation" has been launched against a number of workers who joined picket lines last month in protests demanding better pay from major auto companies in the province of Bursa.

Last month, thousands of workers from major automakers such as Renault, Ford and Tofaş protested at their factories, demanding wage increases. The Renault strike lasted two weeks.

According to a report Tuesday in the *Hürriyet* daily, "The investigation was opened by the Bursa Public Prosecutor's Office under the guise of 'aiding and abetting a terrorist organisation.' " The report did not specify which workers from which factories were under investigation.

According to *Cihan*, "The Bursa Counterterrorism Unit subsequently summoned the workers, who were questioned as to why they walked off the job and whether or not they were intending to form a new labour union. One question referenced the outlawed Communist Workers' Party of Turkey (TKP), claiming that the party was present in all factories in Bursa, and sought to determine whether or not workers had information regarding the TKP's initiatives."

The automotive production industry accounts for a significant element of Turkey's exports. The loss in production sustained during the strike played a major role in driving exports down 19 percent last month, while automotive exports slumped by 27.4 percent.

Israeli Labour Court prevents indefinite strike by rail workers

Last week, the Tel Aviv Labour Court "acceded to the request by Israel Railways for an injunction preventing Israel Railways employees from commencing an indefinite strike today, as they had threatened to do," reported *Globes Online*.

Management at Israel Railways said that the court had ruled that "intensive negotiations" should take place regarding the closure of the railway sheds at Beersheva.

Rail workers insisted the strike was in the framework of a labour dispute that had been declared in accordance with the law, in protest against unilateral measures by the management.

Meanwhile, the Histadrut union federation instructed port workers to comply with a court order to end their wildcat strikes at the Haifa and Ashdod ports.

Transport workers in Mozambique strike for outstanding wages

Employees of the TPM public transport company in Mozambique's capital, Maputo, demonstrated outside the company headquarters on Tuesday, June 2.

The strike and demonstration were called after promises to pay workers outstanding wages by June 1 were broken. The strike followed a breakdown in negotiations between the company and by the trade union representing employees.

A limited transport system was operated by private companies and taxis but was unable to cover all TPM routes.

Nigerian doctors strike for outstanding wages

Doctors at the Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital (ABUTH) in Kaduna state struck on June 2 over unpaid salaries and allowances. The doctors have not been paid since January.

The federal government claims they have provided cash for the hospital to pay the doctors. A representative of the Resident Doctors Association for ABUTH said other states had paid their doctors.

Sudanese teachers resume industrial action

Teachers in Gireida, South Darfur, resumed industrial action on Tuesday after unauthorised withdrawals from their pay continued.

Teachers went on strike May 23 for three days in an attempt bring the 5 percent withdrawals from their pay to an end after a commitment by the state commissioner was made for it to happen.

The teachers' union had agreed to the deduction of pay for five months last year, but when these transactions ended, the commissioner continued to reduce pay. Teachers are also demanding the return of the amount of extra payments that were deducted.

Doctors in Sudanese hospital go on hunger strike

Doctors have begun a hunger strike at the Zalingei Hospital, Central Darfur, in response to brutal treatment of staff by police officers at the hospital last Friday, May 29.

A police officer slapped a doctor for refusing to refer a patient to surgery. On top of the humiliation of the doctors, the hunger strikers were

also protesting the deterioration of their working conditions and arrears to their entitlements.

The police force refused to file a complaint against the police officer, saying they cannot take legal action against a fellow officer.

Zambian university lecturers on go-slow

Lecturers have begun a go-slow at the University of Zambia, Lusaka, claiming excess load payments for last term have not been paid. Excess load payments are made to lecturers when class sizes rise above 75 pupils.

The university lecturers' union said two terms has passed without the load payments. Pensions and gratuities have also not been paid since 2012.

The university teaches 28,000 students, although it was originally designed for only 4,000.

Nigerian airport workers demand removal of military

Last week, members of the Air Transport Services Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (ATSSSAN) and the National Union of Air Transport Employees (NUATE) held a demonstration at Murtala Muhammed Airport.

They were protesting assaults on their colleagues and members by military personnel.

The attacks have occurred since Nigerian Air Force (NAF) officers have been put in charge of air traffic control at the departure section of the international terminal wing of the airport. The protest followed a Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) employee being beaten unconscious and put into a coma by four NAF personnel.

Over the last six months, violence has become a regular event for airport workers. On one occasion, an FAAN member lost his life due to an assault by a naval rating.

Deputy General Secretary of NUATE said the posting of Air Force personnel at the airports contravened the rules and regulations of airport operations as laid down by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). The unions threatened to bring the aviation industry to a standstill unless all Air Force personnel are removed from airports across Nigeria within 21 days



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