

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Strikes by Spanish air control staff

Spanish air traffic control staff began a series of two-hour strikes on Sunday June 7 with employees walking out for two hours from 10am until 12 noon and then again for two hours between 6pm and 8pm. Similar two-hour strikes took place Wednesday, with strikes planned for today and Sunday June 14.

The series of strikes is in response to 61 air traffic control staff sanctioned by the airport operator AENA, for action they took in 2010, which led to the airspace above Barcelona being closed down. The action was backed by more than 80 percent of the USCA union members balloted. USCA represents the vast majority of air control staff.

Under Spanish law the union has to guarantee a minimum of 70 percent capacity of operation in strikes by air control staff.

Rally of strikers in Iceland

Around 1,000 workers on strike in Iceland held a protest rally last Friday outside the office of the prime minister in the country's capital, Reykjavik. The rally was organised by the academics union, BHM and the Association of Icelandic Nurses. The rally was called to coincide with a cabinet meeting.

The strike by nurses is now in its second week while some academics including vets and radiologists have been on strike over two months. They are seeking substantial pay rises.

Youth workers in Wexford, Ireland announce strike

Staff working for the Ferns Diocesan Youth Service (FDYS) in the southern town of Wexford in Ireland are set to strike for one day on June 17. They are members of the SIPTU union. They will picket a crèche run by FDYS as well as the service's head office.

The strike is in response to FDYS's decision to unilaterally change the terms of sick leave benefit and refusal to negotiate the changes with SIPTU.

Irish retail staff to be balloted over pay

Mandate members working for the Primark retail chain in Ireland (where it trades under the name Penney's) are to be balloted over a two percent pay rise. Around 4,000 will take part in the ballot.

Mandate had lodged a claim for a three percent pay rise; Primark came back with a 1.5 percent offer contingent on paying newly enrolled staff at a lower rate. The two percent pay offer was made after the dispute was referred to the Labour Court. The offer is to be backdated to June 1 and to cover the next 12 months. The Labour Court did not make any reference to the two percent offer being linked to a revised (lower) pay scale being offered to new entrants.

Strike by staff of London Docklands Light Railway

Staff working for Interserve, responsible for cleaning and security on the London Docklands Light Railway, held a 48-hour strike beginning Monday. They are members of the RMT rail union. The strike followed previous strike action over pay and working conditions.

Teachers in London college begin series of one day strikes

Members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) at the Sir George Monoux College in northeast London went on strike Wednesday, with plans to strike each Wednesday until the end of term. A three-day strike from August 25 to August 27 is planned to coincide with enrolment week for the new college year.

The teachers are protesting the wrongful dismissal of two long-serving teachers last year, including a health and safety representative. Teachers want the two to be reinstated or offered a financial settlement.

The current action is the third by the teachers in support of their colleagues.

Planned strike of UK probation staff called off

The Unison union has called off a strike by probation officers due to have taken place Thursday June 11, which was to have been followed by a programme of industrial action short of a strike from Friday June 12 onwards.

Unison has said it will enter into further negotiations with employers. The union represents 4,300 probation staff in England and Wales and called the action following a 73 percent vote in favour. Unison members had rejected a zero percent pay offer for 2014. Probation staff represented by NAPO and GMB had not been balloted over the pay offer.

Large parts of the probation service, which supervises and assists people convicted by the courts and deemed as at low or medium risk, has been privatised with the setting up of 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs). Some of these CRCs are now pushing through job cuts.

Academic staff at UK university vote for action over job cuts

Staff at Aberdeen University in Scotland, members of the University and College Union (UCU), have voted by a 73 percent majority to strike and by an 80 percent majority to take action short of a strike. The vote follows proposals by management to cut 150 jobs in an attempt to slash expenditure by £10.5m.

UCU represents around 260 academic and academic-related staff at the university, just over 10 percent of the workforce.

Journalists on local London newspapers to strike

Members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), working for Newsquest that publishes a series of titles in south London, are set to begin a 12-day strike on June 15. Following the strike they will begin a work-to-rule. The action is in response to the publisher's plans to cut jobs and over an inadequate pay offer. Staff are annoyed that the company pays its CEO more than £7.5 million yet offers them a low increase and the threat of job losses.

UK steel workers set for national strike

Steel workers employed by the Indian-based conglomerate Tata, have voted to take strike action on June 22. Prior to the strike they are to impose an overtime ban and work-to-rule next week. The 17,000 workers are members of the trade union Community, which was formed from the merger of the former Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) with several other unions. The strike, if it goes ahead, will be the first national steel industry strike for 35 years.

The action is in response to Tata's decision to close the current final salary pension scheme, which Tata claims has a £2 billion shortfall. They also want to get rid of the provision allowing steel workers to retire at 60. Tata operates at several sites across the UK, including Port Talbot and Newport in Wales as well as sites in England such as Corby, Hartlepool, Rotherham and Scunthorpe amongst others.

One Port Talbot steel employee expressed his concerns as he spoke to the press: "Working 12-hour shifts at my age is hard, but at 65 it's going to be dangerous."

Strike of West Bank medics

Hospital doctors across the West Bank went on strike Tuesday to protest the arrest of a doctor by Palestinian security forces. On Monday doctors at Rafidia hospital, where the doctor worked, held a strike over the same issue. The doctor was arrested following the death in childbirth of a woman in the doctor's care. She died several weeks ago and the doctor is still being held though no charges as yet have been levelled against him.

Nigerian local government workers continue strike

Local government workers are continuing their indefinite strike, which began May 26 leading to the paralysis of local government in Osun state. The local government employees are among many throughout Nigeria demanding a backlog of wages and pensions that have not been paid. Out of the 36 states in Nigeria, more than half owe between three and eight months in wages to local council employees. There are widespread arrears of wages owed to public sector workers in the civil service, teaching and hospitals throughout the country and represent a major cause of strikes.

Nigerian health workers strike over conditions

Nigerian health workers have taken strike action over issues which are crippling the health service.

The National Union of Allied Health Professionals, comprising pharmacists, physiotherapists, medical laboratory scientists, radiographers, dieticians and other health professionals as well as nurses and doctors, are complaining about lack of promotion and want the retirement age moved from 60 to 65 years. An angry demonstration took place at the Federal Medical Centre in Owerri in Imo state against plans by the Medical Director to have the centre managed by a public private partnership.

Nigerian agricultural researchers strike

Nigeria's National Cereal Research Institute was brought to a halt on Tuesday, when members of three trade unions took indefinite strike action. They came out demanding the sacking of the acting executive director for misappropriating institute funds. The three unions, the Academic Staff Union of Research Institute (ASURI), Senior Staff Association (SSA) and Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), were protesting over the N100 million (\$500,000) that has gone missing as a result of fraudulent contracts.

Strike by Kenyan road construction gang

Young workers who have been carrying out road repairs over the last three months in Jonvu, Mombasa County held a demonstration over pay arrears. They were demanding to be paid the Sh8,400 (\$85) they are each owed. They decided to down tools when an appeal to their Member of Parliament was ignored. On top of the debt, the youth had expected to be paid Sh500 (\$5) by the employing contractor and Sh100 (\$1) by the Jonvu

Constituency Development Fund (CDF) last week, but the CDF portion had not been paid.

Rwandan agricultural workers demand their pay

Five hundred Rwandan agricultural labourers working for Modern Terrace Construction in Mwurile, demonstrated on Tuesday demanding to be paid. The Minister of Finance has run up a debt of Rwf11 million (\$15,908) in unpaid wages.

The workforce has not been paid for 90 days. The project, under the land consolidation program, has diverted local crop production to large-scale terrace production of selected crops. The scheme is meant to increase employment and improve productivity in food production.

Namibian building workers protest unsafe working

Building workers from several construction sites in Outapi, Omusati Region, Namibia held a protest against unsafe working conditions.

Three workers had been killed on site recently and many others are suffering from injuries. Two of the workers who lost their lives in April were working for Tona Trading, owned by the prime minister's husband. The unions called for Tona Trading and another company responsible for the third builder's death, to be prosecuted, and the site inspectorate to be disbanded as they were not carrying out their duties.



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