

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

26 June 2015

Europe

Strike by German postal staff enters third week

The strike by around 30,000 German postal workers at Deutsche Post DHL has entered its third week. They are members of the Ver.di union.

The employees are opposing plans for their jobs to be outsourced to Delivery GmbH group, which would entail a 20 percent pay cut. While 140,000 postal staff are affected by the threat to outsource their work, less than a quarter have been called out on strike by Ver.di.

Ver.di chief negotiator Andrea Kocsis called on the employer to return to the negotiating table.

Scottish ferry workers strike

Ferry workers employed by Caledonian MacBrayne (CalMac), which provides services to the whole of west Scotland, as well as to Western Isles and Inner Hebrides, took industrial action this week. Wednesday and Thursday they refused to work overtime and today plan to hold a 24-hour strike.

They are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) union.

CalMac's contract with the Scottish government is due to run out at the end of next year. In line with EU rules, the contract has to be put out for tender. Ferry staff is concerned that whoever wins the new contract will impose staff cuts and attack pension rights.

The RMT is currently in negotiations with the Scottish government regarding the dispute.

UK white goods warehouse and delivery workers to be balloted

The 200-plus drivers and warehouse staff working for white goods manufacturer Indesit UK Ltd are being balloted for industrial action.

The ballot closes on July 7. The workers, members of the Unite union, are seeking a substantial pay increase following years of below inflation awards.

They are concerned over plans by the company to reduce the terms of redundancy pay. Currently the amount is calculated on the basis of a guaranteed 45-hour week, but the company is planning to base it on a 37 or 40-hour week, depending on the employees' contract.

Portuguese ambulance staff overtime ban

Portuguese Accident and Emergency (A&E) ambulance staff began an indefinite overtime ban Wednesday. They are members of the A&E ambulance crew union.

They began the action following the breakdown of talks between the union and the government over working conditions.

Planned strike by Icelandic workers called off

A strike by more than 10,000 Icelandic workers, members of six trade unions, was called off at the last minute. They were due to begin a seven-day strike at midnight on Monday, but it was halted after unions reached an agreement with employers' representative body SA, Business Iceland.

The proposed strike would have involved electricians, food production staff, air traffic control staff and metal workers, among others. They were seeking improved pay and conditions.

More nurses resign in Iceland dispute

More nurses have resigned, following a ruling ordering them and members of the Association of Academics (BHM) to return to work, enforcing negotiations currently taking place. Earlier this month, a bill was passed in the Icelandic parliament to end the strike. Many nurses resigned as a result. In total, nearly 190 health care staff, including 158 nurses, have quit.

On June 24, representatives of the Icelandic Nurses' Association signed a new wage contract, following 13 hours of talks. Nurses will vote on the new agreement by July 15.

In an indication that concessions have been accepted by the union, the association's chair, Ólafur Skúlason, said, "Given the circumstances, we are content with what we have on the table. We would certainly have wanted to achieve more but don't believe it would have been possible now."

Norwegian oil workers may strike

Trade unions are in talks this week to try and avert a strike by some 190 oil rig staff working for Teekay Corp, which runs two oil production ships in the Norwegian Knarr and Varg oil fields.

The oil production workers are demanding a wage increase.

Three unions are involved in the talks with the employer and a state-appointed mediator. If the strike goes ahead, it could lead to the two oil fields closing down.

Turkish auto workers sacked following strike

On May 15, auto workers employed by Renault, Tofas and Ford Otosan at plants in Turkey came out on strike for a week. They were joined by employees working for car part factories.

Tofas, a joint venture between Fiat and Turkish investment firm, Koc Holdings, sacked over 140 of its employees this week.

In a separate development, workers in car part factories organised by the Metal Workers' Union are reported to be coming out on strike today. They are opposing a meagre pay increase of \$37 a month resulting from their strike in mid-May.

Middle East

Strike by Iranian textile workers enters second month

Over 100 workers at the Iran Barak textile factory in Rasht, the capital of Gilan province, have been on strike for more than a month.

They are striking to protest nine months of unpaid wages and problems getting benefits owed to them. This month the company paid two months back wages, but they are now owed for eight months, as June wages are now due.

A letter signed by 80 strikers sought the intervention of the Gilan province minister of labour.

Strike of Israeli airport baggage handlers

Baggage handlers at Israel's Ben Gurion International Airport struck Wednesday, leading to the delay of over 10 flights. They are employed by the Israel Airport Authority (IAA).

The strike is over staffing shortages. The airport sees a big surge in numbers over the summer period, but according to the union, IAA management failed to respond to warnings for the need for more staff.

Africa

Strike of Cameroon health staff

Health workers in Cameroon's hospitals are on strike over unbearable and dilapidated conditions in the hospitals.

They are demanding state of the art medical equipment, more drugs to treat patients and action to be taken against corruption. They are also demanding salary arrears be paid, with some staff going without wages for 12 months.

A nurse, cited in the media, commented that none of the machinery has been working in the radiography department for months, and much of the hospital equipment is broken, as it was bought secondhand.

Kenyan civil servants set to strike

Kenyan civil servants threatened to strike on July 1, if the government does not stop interfering with pension premiums. The National Health Insurance Fund is wholly funded by workers' payments.

The Trade Union Congress has given the government seven days to revoke its announcement of increases and pay back the increased amounts already paid in. They are also opposed to a Salaries Remuneration Commission, saying it does not have the constitutional right to decide salary increases. The union said the scheme had not been used to determine the pay increases of

members of parliament.

Namibian sugar mill strike

Workers at Namib Sugar Mills took strike action in defence of victimised colleagues on June 18. They demonstrated outside the company premises, demanding the reinstatement of two sacked colleagues victimised on trumped-up charges.

A worker defending one of the two said he was dismissed because "he was opening the eyes of others about a certain manager who treated workers like slaves."

Nigerian local government workers protest unpaid wages

Local government workers in the Nigerian state of Baysela declared a three-day warning strike on June 23 to demand unpaid wages. One explained she had received nothing for four months.

The National Union of Local Government Employees says attempts to address the situation with the council have failed. The union threatened further action if nothing is resolved.

Nigerian newspaper staff walk out

Employees of *This Day* newspaper took industrial action, closing the paper's head office on June 20. The National Union of Printing and Paper Product Workers is striking to get eight to nine months' outstanding wages paid.

Promises were made by management to pay workers at five months' arrears, but they have continued to grow. The employer previously banned management from striking so the paper could be prepared at headquarters and then sent out to be printed elsewhere.

Strike by refuse workers in South Africa

Around 250 South African garbage collectors went on strike over pay on June 17, parking their trucks randomly in Port Elizabeth city centre.

The strike proceeded after mediation between the South African Local Government Association and the 160,000 strong Municipal Workers Union broke down. Workers are demanding an 11 percent wage increase, with management offering 5.9 percent.

A local government representative declared the strike illegal and said the council would not tolerate this type of action. A no-work-no-pay policy would apply, he added.

One-day protest strike by Zambian rail workers

Zambian railway workers held a one-day strike on June 20. They returned after management promised that the K27 million (US\$3,678,480) owed in termination dues would be paid. The government terminated its 20-year contract with Zambian Railways Limited recently.

The Zambian government made a pledge to the union that it would take on the debt and pay the workers their dues.

ZRL claimed they lost K1 million (US\$136,240) on revenues from loss of passenger and freight service due to the strike. It is a subsidiary of NLPI Ltd and its shareholders are Nedbank Ltd, Old Mutual and Sanlam, all major South African financial institutions, together with the New Limpopo Bridge Project Ltd.



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