

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

3 July 2015

Europe

French ferry staff in renewed strike action

French employees of the Calais-based MyFerryLink took further strike action Tuesday against the threat of job cuts. Using burning tyres, they once again blocked the Eurotunnel entrance, leading to the temporary closure of the rail link between England and France. They also blockaded the port and roads leading to the port, causing long tailbacks of lorries in France and England.

The MyFerryLink ferry service had been owned by Eurotunnel, but under pressure by British authorities, citing unfair competition, it was sold. The Danish company DFDS was due to take ownership Thursday. DFDS says it plans to keep only 202 of the nearly 600 workers currently employed.

French oil refinery staff called out

The CGT union called on its members to strike Thursday at the La Mede plant on the Mediterranean coast, owned by Total. It called for Total service stations to be blockaded each Thursday throughout the summer, in opposition to company plans to stop the processing of crude oil at La Mede.

Fifteen workers have been on strike at La Mede since June 11 over threatened layoffs, as the company plans to end the processing of crude oil and convert to producing biofuels.

UK college staff protest

Lecturers at Bradford College in the north of England held a one-day strike Tuesday to oppose job losses arising from cuts in the Further Education (FE) budget.

The Conservative government proposes to cut the budget for adult education by nearly a quarter, which will impact the jobs and courses offered at FE colleges. Staff at colleges in Barnsley and Sheffield had been due to strike the same day, but the action was called off at the last minute after an agreement on no compulsory redundancies. The UCU, which represents lecturers, is seeking to halt compulsory job loss agreements, which enable the colleges to shed jobs through voluntary redundancies.

At the rally in Leeds, local, regional and national UCU representatives spoke of the need for unity to oppose the job losses. Yet the union is isolating the disputes at FE colleges and facilitating the erosion of further education. Other colleges throughout the UK are facing similar attacks.

Construction insulation staff in north of England to ballot

Staff employed by Saint Gobain Isover in its Runcorn plant, northwest England are to ballot on industrial action. The result will be announced on July 6.

The factory produces insulation used in building construction. The workers have rejected a 2 percent pay offer.

Underground staff in Portuguese capital halt services

Underground staff on Lisbon's metro system went on strike Friday last week, bringing the whole network to a halt. Services were only resumed on Saturday morning.

The strike was against the privatisation of the service. The metro system, along with the city's bus service have been bought by Spanish transport group Avanza. Workers fear Avanza will make them redundant and then rehire them with lower pay and worse conditions.

German airline union suspends threatened action

UFO, the union representing flight attendants employed by German airline Lufthansa, has postponed strike action due this week.

Currently Lufthansa flight attendant staff are able to take early retirement at age 55 and have access to company pension payments. Lufthansa wants to get rid of this provision and wants to make staff contribute more to their pension scheme.

UFO suspended the threatened action in order to pursue further negotiations with the company. Any possible strike has been delayed until mid-July, if at all.

Icelandic nurses dispute settled

Last week, talks involving the Icelandic Association of Nurses (FIH) agreed to new terms of pay and conditions.

Nurses struck at the end of May, but were forced to return to work and enter negotiations after a June 13 ruling by the Icelandic parliament.

Under the agreement, nurses will get an 18.6 percent pay rise over the next three years. It is not clear what will happen to the nearly 170 nurses who resigned in protest at the passing of legislation forcing them to return to work.

Norwegian offshore oil rig workers sign pay deal

Unions representing Norwegian oil rig workers have signed a deal under which they will receive a 1 percent increase or Crowns 5,500 (\$700), whichever is greater. The deal averted a strike of some 200 employees of the Teekay Corp., which runs production ships in the Norwegian Knarr and Varg oil fields.

Cypriot port workers oppose privatisation

Port workers at Limassol began an indefinite overtime ban on

Wednesday in opposition to government plans to privatise the port. The employees represented by four unions have said they will hold a 24-hour strike in two weeks' time.

Spanish airport baggage strike announced

Around 3,500 Spanish airport baggage handlers employed by Globalia, a subsidiary of Groundforce have announced they will begin an indefinite strike on Saturday at seven Spanish airports, including Barcelona-El, Gran Canaria and Madrid-Barajas.

They are seeking a pay increase and an increase to the number of permanent posts by offering them to some of those currently on temporary contracts.

Turkish car workers who went on strike sacked

Around 250 car production workers in Bursa province who went on strike in May have been sacked. Those sacked include disabled workers.

Car production workers employed by Tofas, Rolmek, Mako and other companies went on strike against low wages and poor conditions. One employee with eight years' service, and suffering hearing and speaking disabilities was sacked from the Tofas factory. The dismissed workers held a protest on Saturday in Bursa city centre.

Middle East

Suspended Egyptian workers demand the reopening of factory

Workers at the Suez based Misr-Iran textile factory have been demonstrating outside the factory since last week.

Around 2,000 employees were suspended after the company's assets in the bank were frozen, leading to a shortage of material. The employees who accuse management of faking losses are demanding the suspended staff are taken back on.

Iranian nurses protest non-payment of wages

Nurses in the city of Hamadan carried out a sit-in Tuesday to protest the non-payment of wages and lack of job security. The sit-in blocked one of the major streets of the city. The nurses held a similar protest in May.

There is a reported shortage of 80,000 nurses in Iran, yet many qualified nurses are leaving the country seeking improved conditions abroad.

Africa

Kenyan port staff walk out

The Kenyan port at Mombasa was brought to a halt Monday, when 5,000 dockers went on strike against a newly-introduced wage system and late payment of wages. They are responding to large wage discrepancies created by the new time management biometric system introduced at the beginning of June.

Management and the union claim the system is suffering from

teething troubles. But the biometric system, based on the Wajibika platform introduced in 2013, is a facility that places collective responsibility onto employees to improve performance and "fulfill potential." The union and management have agreed to suspend the system for three months, so they can secure its acceptance among the dock workers.

Services have been paralysed at other ports throughout Kenya by the Dock Workers Union, striking over wrongful deductions from their wages through the new National Hospital Insurance Fund. Managers are having to man toll stations at the ferry ports.

Nigerian university staff to strike

Nigerian university staff say they are preparing for strike action to oppose the withdrawal of government funding to in-house schools. The government's National University Commission (NUC) is claiming the schools are private and state funding should be removed.

The Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) says the strike is imminent and will incorporate non-teaching staff at the universities. SSANU insist the agreement of state funding for in-house education has existed since 2001 and was ratified in 2009. They accuse the NUC of lying when it claims the scrapping was agreed with the unions. Over 2,000 jobs will be lost if the schools are closed.

Nigerian medics protest

Resident doctors at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) have gone on strike following a 21-day ultimatum and a three-day warning strike. The Association of Resident Doctors (ARD) is concerned about the dilapidated condition of the hospital, which occasionally runs out of water—opening it up to danger and diseases. One doctor explained there were no drip stands in the hospital and they had to buy their own writing materials and other consumables.

The strikers are also aggrieved that the policy of skipping, whereby doctors are given double promotions, has not been implemented by LUTH even though it was legislated for by the federal government. LUTH management has applied the policy of skipping to other health staff, but not doctors.

Nigerian transport workers demonstrate over union subs

Nigerian transport workers held demonstrations in parts of Abadan against exorbitant increases in the union dues paid to the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW).

Leading union members stand at every bus stop and collect dues on the driver's route. Since many new stops have been established there has been an increase in these extortion-type collections.



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