

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

24 July 2015

Striking French ferry workers continue protests

Striking ferry workers in France blockaded the motorway leading to the Channel Tunnel entrance in Calais Tuesday. It was the latest action by the employees of MyFerryLink, who are protesting job cuts.

The protest resulted in delays of around one hour to freight Eurotunnel services at Folkestone. P&O ferry services were also delayed by up to 30 minutes.

A *Russia Today* report said the blockade was organised by the Syndicat Maritime Nord trade union.

A statement from Eurotunnel read, “The protesters went on to the motorway and started burning tires at the two entrances to the Channel Tunnel terminal. The protesters have now left of their own free will—it didn’t look as if the police removed them”.

Job losses are expected following Eurotunnel’s sale of its ferry service to Denmark’s DFDS.

PostNL services hit by parcel deliverers’ strike

Dutch mail and parcel delivery firm PostNL announced last week that its services were hit by a strike by some of its self-employed parcel deliverers. According to PostNL, 15 percent of parcel deliveries were delayed by one or more days.

Earlier this month, the firm requested its more than 1,000 freelance parcel deliverers become permanent company employees. This followed concerns being aired by the postal workers’ union FNV over the status of PostNL’s employees.

A report on the *Post&Parcel* web site stated that PostNL said “Alternatively, if they choose to remain as ‘entrepreneurs’, the company said that their ‘remuneration will be increased by about 10 percent’.”

Some of the self-employed delivery drivers rejected the offer negotiated by FNV. *Post&Parcel* added, “Some of the independent parcel deliverers voted against the offer and took industrial action—but it seems that the dispute may now be resolved.”

The strike ended on July 20 with the firm announcing it was clearing a large backlog of undelivered items.

UK civil servants in dispute

Around 1,500 civil servants employed at the government’s Universal Credit (welfare benefit) service at Bolton, England, and Glasgow, Scotland, struck on Monday and Tuesday of this week. According to the

Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), there was a 95 percent turnout for the strike.

They are protesting over a variety of issues, including lack of staff, imposition of new conditions, severe restrictions on flexible working arrangements and inadequate training. The two-day strike was due to be followed by industrial action short of strike action.

Scottish homeless case workers end long-running action

Seventy homeless case workers employed by Glasgow City Council had been out on strike since the end of March. The Unison members walked out over job evaluation, arguing that they were being paid £5,000 less a year than staff doing similar work.

Following a meeting this week, the strikers agreed to accept an offer from the employer and return to work. Under the deal, 68 posts will be created at a higher pay band, but the number of posts at this higher pay band will be reduced to 54 by 2017. They are expected to return to work next week.

To be eligible for the new posts, the case workers must undertake a competency test. Those who pass will receive an extra £1,000-a-year pay increase, rising to £5,000 by 2018. In the interim, all those involved in the dispute will receive a one-off £350 payment, which is not backdated. Three temporary staff involved in the dispute will be offered posts in other sections of the council’s homeless service. The number of managers in the homeless service will be reduced through a process of voluntary redundancy.

A council spokesman welcoming the deal explained: “It would never have been possible to agree to regrade these staff in their previous roles—however, many of them will now step into new, promoted posts with additional responsibilities following an interview.”

Hospital staff in Scottish capital to be balloted over pay parity

Unison began balloting its 300 members working as porters, cleaners and care staff at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary on Monday. They are employed by Cofley, part of a multinational conglomerate company. The staff are seeking pay parity with their counterparts working for NHS Lothian who are paid 25p an hour more.

Cofley announced at the last minute that it is prepared to match the pay of NHS Lothian staff; however, the ballot is still going ahead, as the company reportedly has made similar promises before but then reneged on them.

Talks over Scottish ferry job losses stall

Little progress was reported at talks taking place this week between the RMT union and CalMac representatives. Caledonian MacBryane known as CalMac runs ferry services in the Clyde area and to the Scottish Islands. CalMac is a subsidiary of the holding company David MacBryane, which in turn is owned by the Scottish government. In line with the European Union, CalMac must put the contract up for tender.

The private sector company Serco is in the bid. Ferry staff fear that, should it succeed, there will be job losses and deterioration in their pay and conditions. A proposed 24-hour strike by RMT staff at CalMac due last week was called off to allow further discussions. The TSSA, which represents administration and shore staff employed by CalMac, also called off proposed strike action in lieu of further discussions.

Turkish doctors face dismissal

New regulations implemented by the Turkish Ministry of Health could lead to the dismissal of 30,000 Turkish family doctors.

Doctors demonstrated earlier in the year against plans to make them work a Saturday each month—an extra eight hours—and struck in May against the added workload.

Under the new regulations, health care staff missing a scheduled work shift will receive 20 disciplinary points, up from the 5 points that had previously been in place. In addition, any doctor awarded more than 100 disciplinary points will be considered for dismissal.

A spokesman for the Family Physicians Association Federation speaking to the press stated: “The Turkish health care system is on the edge of chaos. If the Ministry of Health is determined to implement its regulations, it will have to end the contracts of 30,000 out of 44,000 family doctors.”

Threatened strike called off by Israeli trade union federation

A strike planned by the Israeli trade union federation Histadrut has been called off following negotiations between the union body and Ministry of Finance officials.

The strike was meant to protest poor conditions and pay for outsourced contract workers employed by the Finance Ministry. As a result of the agreement, around 10,000 contract workers will become directly employed by the ministry with enhanced pay and conditions. Hundreds of thousands of similarly employed contract workers in the ministry will maintain their current disadvantaged status.

Palestinian workers denied equal rights

Around 100 Palestinians working in an Israeli-owned factory in the Nitzanei Shalom industrial area near Tulkarm have lost a legal case before the Israeli National Labour Court. The workers argued they should enjoy the same pay and working conditions as three Israelis employed in the West Bank factory.

A High Court of Justice ruling in 2007 stated Palestinians living in the

West Bank but working for Israelis in the Givat Ze'ev settlement were entitled to the same pay and conditions as Israelis.

But the court ruled that the Tulkarm factory comes under a special category, as it was part of an agreement to give Palestinians jobs under the Oslo Accords. The court ruled Jordanian law, not Israeli law, should apply, and so the claim was refused.

Strike of South African toll operator staff continues

The month-long dispute involving the toll operator Tolcon, at the Hugenot Tunnel in Cape Town, and the South African Transport and Allied Trade Union is continuing. The workers are demanding a R400 (US\$32)-a-month pay increase and a R200 (US\$16) danger allowance, whereas the company is offering a R305 (US\$24) pay increase.

The union has indicated a deal was imminent but did not give any details.

South African firefighters go slow

South African firefighters were on a go-slow in response to unpaid overtime. The Johannesburg firefighters were expected to work 48 hours, although they were only paid for 40. They are refusing to turn out on the last two hours unless they are paid for the extra eight hours. Other non-firefighting station staff are covering the two hours.

The firefighters are threatening wildcat strike action if no solution is found. The Johannesburg City Council has declared that this would be illegal, as the fire service is an emergency service, and are seeking a court ruling. The demand for overtime payment is to be sent to arbitration.

South African telecom staff end dispute

The South African Telecommunications Workers Union has struck a deal with mobile phone operating company MTN and called off its eight-week strike. The union secured an annual bonus payment of 12 percent and employment of casual workers, but an annual pay increase is still outstanding.

Strike by Nigerian local government staff in Kwara state

The strike by Nigerian local government employees in Kwara State continues. Their strike is to protest unpaid salaries ranging from periods of two to five months. The all-out strike of the Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees, which began on July 16, is affecting all 16 councils across the state. The strike mirrors action taking place in other states throughout Nigeria with similar nonpayment of wages.

Protest by Zimbabwean steel workers

Zimbabwean workers at Ziscosteel, the local iron- and steel-making plant in Redcliff, demonstrated on Saturday, July 18, over poor living conditions, their abuse by top management and the lack of government support for the mill.

The Zimbabwe Metal, Energy and Allied Workers Union said the lack of payment of wages since 2008 and the threat of closure of the mill employing 5,000 workers have left workers in severe poverty. The union accused management of corruption and of looting the mill.

Namibian salt workers dispute continues

Workers at Wavis Bay Salt Holdings are continuing their protracted strike after the Namibian company lost its attempt to drive the workers back to work through a court ruling. A strike was called July 6 demanding an end to discrimination in pay, and the illegal reduction of holidays and medical coverage, among other complaints. The company claims the differences in pay are the result of shifting workers from redundant positions into lower-graded jobs but not reducing wages, asserting this was agreed to by the union, the Mineworkers Union of Namibia.

Although the company lost its illegal strike claim, with costs against it, it intends to make a new appeal to the courts. The new claim accuses workers of interfering with equipment that has resulted in damages to company property.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact