

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

31 July 2015

Strike of UK nuclear safety staff

Around 400 staff at the Sellafield nuclear power plant in northwest England held a one-day strike Tuesday. Members of the GMB union are responsible for the monitoring of levels of radiation throughout the plant. GMB is accusing Sellafield management of reneging on a pay deal. The company agreed a 2.2 percent pay increase, but says it will only apply to health monitoring staff satisfying agreed criteria. GMB argues the pay rise should apply to health monitors across the board.

London university staff strike

Some 250 staff at London's Metropolitan University walked out on July 24. The members of the Unison union are protesting the university's plans to cut 165 mainly administrative jobs. They have so far held a total of three separate days of strike action and are also pursuing industrial action short of a strike.

London gallery staff take action

Staff in the UK capital's prestigious National Gallery in Trafalgar Square are to step up action in their opposition to the gallery's plans to privatise the service. The jobs of around 400 gallery staff are threatened with privatization.

The members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union have taken more than 50 days of action to date. They have walked out on a weekly basis. The PCS has now announced there will be four more days of action followed by an all-out strike from August 17.

London tube drivers' ongoing action

Drivers working for London Underground are refusing to take out trains not correctly "prepped," saying such trains are unsafe. The workers, members of the RMT trade union, are also refusing to train staff relocated from their normal posts and locations in an attempt by London Underground (LU) to get round RMT's overtime ban.

Drivers refusing to take out trains are threatened with being sent home without pay. The overtime ban is in response to LU's plans to operate a 24-hour service.

No resolution to French ferry workers dispute

The fight by MyFerryLink staff to defend their jobs continues. The MyFerryLink service between Calais and Dover is run by a Eurotunnel subsidiary company. Under European Union competition rules it has been taken over by Danish company DFDS. The Danish company plans to cut jobs when it runs the service.

The MyFerryLink employees have been involved in a militant struggle to defend their jobs, involving strikes and blockades. Freight lorries have been held up, leading to Kent Police running Operation Stack on the English side of the channel connection. During the operation, police parked lorries on the M20 motorway in Kent. Hundreds of lorries are parked on motorways approaching Dover. Another consequence has been the heightened efforts by migrants to get into the UK via the tunnel.

An effort to end the dispute by the French government last week was rejected by ferry workers. Under the proposal, the Socialist Party government of Francoise Hollande called on Eurotunnel to set up a ferry charter service that would offer employment to around 150 of the current MyFerryLink employees.

The ferry workers' union in Calais, Maritime Nord, suspended the action and ferry sailings were resumed on Tuesday. This followed talks that day between Transport Minister Alain Vidalies, Eurotunnel management, DFDS management and the union at which new proposals for settling the dispute were put forward.

Dispute closes Italian tourist sites

Tourists could not access the Colosseum in Rome on Thursday, nor see the sites of Pompeii on Friday. Staff who oversee access to these historic sites were holding meetings organised by their union to discuss delays in their pay and staff shortages.

Budget cuts by the Ministry of Culture, which has oversight of these historic sites, is to blame for the pay delays and staff shortages. A reorganisation pushed through by the Ministry has only made things worse. Tourist site workers are represented by the FLP BAC union.

Italian airline staff hold 24-hour strike

Pilots and cabin crew working for the Italian national airline Alitalia, members of the Anpac pilot and cabin crew union, held a 24-hour strike July 24. The strike was called over pay disparity between Alitalia air crew and CityLiner air crew.

CityLiner is a subsidiary of Alitalia flying short-haul flights. The union is also protesting the use of contract air crew by Alitalia to cover staff shortages in the busy summer period.

Protest by Polish dock workers

On July 21, some 100 dock workers, members of the Solidarnosc union, held a protest outside the offices of their employer DCT. The company runs Poland's largest shipping container terminal in the port of Gdansk.

The workers are seeking a collective bargaining agreement to be able to negotiate on pay, permanent contracts and working conditions. They are considering strike action if the company fails to listen to their appeals. The union also accuses DCT of sacking members because of their union activity.

Slovak health unions plan protests

Six health unions in Slovakia are calling for the new Ministry of Health legislation on remuneration, which currently only covers state hospital workers, to be applied to all health workers. The current legislation will guarantee salary levels for only one-third of all health workers.

Six unions, including the Association of Nurses and Midwives Union and the Slovak Chamber of Paramedics, will pressure parliament to widen the scope of the guaranteed wage. Should that fail they will organise a series of protest actions to coincide with meal breaks. Under Slovak legislation, health care staff are forbidden to strike.

Bulgarian ordinance workers plan protest

Employees at the state-owned military equipment plant VMZ in the Bulgarian town of Sopot are demanding a pay increase and improved working conditions. They plan to hold a protest to push their demands.

Gazans protest cuts in UNRWA services

Hundreds of refugees in Gaza city held a protest on Sunday. They were protesting against cuts in health and educational services offered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

Strike by municipal electricians in South Africa

Electricians and energy staff employed by the Port Elizabeth metropolitan municipality came out on strike, demanding the municipality pay its staff the scarce skills allowance as promised after a strike on July 16.

Municipality management claim the strike is illegal. In response, the electricians said they were on site waiting for the outcome of their

allowance negotiations. The scarce skills allowance agreement was due to be implemented July 31, but management are attempting to move it forward into August, causing concern among the skilled workers.

Nigerian state employees strike over unpaid wages

More workers in Nigerian states have gone on strike over unpaid wages. Imo and Osun state workers have joined other states throughout Nigeria in withdrawing their labour over widespread nonpayment of wages.

State governors, although promising to pay their employees through agreement with their unions, are reneging on the contracts. Even the Enugu state-sponsored football team, Enugu Rangers, have quit training until they get their five months outstanding salaries.

Nigerian construction workers protest job transfers

Five hundred Nigerian construction workers demonstrated against being transferred from their employer, the China Civil Engineering and Construction Corporation (CCECC), to a Chinese sister company, the China Railway Construction Corporation Limited (CRCC), without their work packages being transferred.

CCECC has laid off 3,000 builders on very shaky excuses. In a protest action, the builders barricaded the entrance to their former employers' head office in Lagos.

The action affected several multi-billion naira projects as they downed tools. They included the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, the Lagos-Badagry expressway, the Blue Line light rail and the expanded Ikorodu Road scheme.

Workers complained that, although they pay N600 (\$3) a month in union dues, their rights are not being represented.

Botswana tax collectors strike

One thousand tax collectors employed by the Botswana Unified Revenues Service (BURS) went out on strike July 24. BURS imposed a 6 percent salary increase. The Botswana Public Employees Union had put in an 11 percent claim.

They are striking two days each week. BURS manual workers union members and nonunion members are continuing to work normally. An attempt by government to send the strikers back to work through the courts failed. A 6 percent pay increase has been imposed on state employees throughout the country. The strike is affecting border security and tax collection.

Zimbabwean workers protest court rulings

Unions across Zimbabwe are threatening strikes and demonstrations against court rulings that drastically attack workers' conditions. Unions accuse the court rulings of encouraging employers to carry out mass sackings and change working conditions.

The Supreme Court ruled July 17 that any employer can give a three-month termination of employment decision to its workforce without any redundancy payment, disregarding existing contracts. The court also ruled on July 27 that employers could withdraw housing, school fees and other allowances unless they were part of an existing collective bargaining agreement, because these conditions are not mandatory.

These rulings leave employees completely at the mercy of the employer. Six thousand workers have lost their jobs over the last week under the new ruling.

Cleaners at Namibian hospital walk out

Cleaners at the Katima Mulilo state hospital have withdrawn their labour, complaining of increased workloads and unpaid overtime.

The cleaners' representative said that there has been a severe shortage of staff since 2008 and that management have not replaced retiring staff, or staff leaving for other purposes. Staff say they feel overburdened with extra work, but receive no extra pay.

The union signed an agreement with management on July 1 that reinstituted the practice of cleaners working in pairs, but management has so far failed to bring it in.

The cleaners have not been paid for overtime between May and June.



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