

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

20 May 2016

## Protests continue in France over labour law reforms

Transport workers and truck drivers held strikes and protests this week against the labour law reforms imposed last week by the Hollande government that will make it easier to fire workers. Orly and Charles de Gaulle airports in Paris were disrupted when engineers, technicians and traffic control staff went on strike.

Two rail unions, CGT and Sud Rail held strikes beginning Wednesday morning through to Friday. The action is also part of an ongoing dispute with the rail company SNCF over contract negotiations. Regional, inter-city and high-speed services were affected.

Port and dockworkers held 24-hour strikes Tuesday and Thursday disrupting ferry services.

Local train services around Paris were impacted by strike action as were bus services in Antibes, Nice and Grasse.

Protest marches were held in Paris on Tuesday and Thursday against the changes in labour law. Teachers and other school staff in some schools also took action leading to schools being closed.

Truck drivers blockaded food and fuel supply depots and rode slow moving convoys to slow or jam traffic on major highways.

## Light rail staff in Irish capital defy threats

Drivers and other staff employed on the Dublin light rail system, Luas, run by Transdev are maintaining their dispute in the face of threats from management.

Luas staff have held a series of four-hour strikes in their long running dispute over a substantial pay rise. Transdev management have threatened to dock a full day's pay from any staff partaking in the four-hour strikes. They are also excluding them from sick pay benefits claiming sickness absence has increased sharply during the dispute.

## Irish care staff vote for action at juvenile residential centre

Residential care staff and overnight supervisory staff at the Oberstown residential care unit for youth offenders in County Dublin have voted in favour of action against their employer.

Around 50 youth with criminal convictions and challenging behavior are held at the centre. Staff say the facilities are inadequate to deal with their charges and are concerned for their safety as well as inadequate staffing levels. Over 60 staff have been assaulted and there are high levels of sickness absence.

## Portuguese airport ground handling staff walk-out

Airport ground handling staff employed by the Portway and Groundforce companies, who are responsible for aircraft support services at Portuguese airports went on strike on Thursday. They are members of the aviation union SITAVA. They are protesting job insecurity and redundancy threats. Airports across Portugal were affected.

In March Portway announced over 250 redundancies after losing a major contract. Striking workers held protests outside government offices.

## Russian construction worker's extreme protest

Victor Larshin a 38-year-old Russian construction worker in the city of Omsk went to extreme lengths to protest against unpaid wages. He wired his lips together and posted a video of it on YouTube to publicize his plight after he and his 36 co-workers had not been paid their wages since February. They had been employed on a site in the Siberian city of Tobolsk, where they were building an oil refinery. Following the protest the company eventually paid the arrears.

## Ongoing dispute by school janitors in Scottish city of Glasgow

School janitors, members of the Unison began a five-day strike on Monday. They are employed by Cordia, an arms length company run by Glasgow city council.

The latest five-day strike is part of an ongoing dispute. Staff are demanding additional payments for undertaking dirty and hazardous tasks, which would increase their annual salary by between £500 and £1,000 a year. Staff employed directly by the council receive such payments.

Protests have been held outside city council headquarters to push their demands.

## Staff at UK rail company hold 24-hour strike

Staff working for Southern Rail, which operates services in the southeast of England began a 24-hour strike on Wednesday. They are members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT).

The dispute is over plans by the company to abolish the safety roles currently carried out by guard/conductor staff on the trains and hand the

role to train drivers. At this stage the company states that staff performing the guard/conductor role will be given other on-board roles.

In the ongoing dispute, rail staff have already held several strikes with further ones planned. The action led to the cancellation of hundreds of trains over one of the country's busiest rail networks.

### **Staff at UK timber processor in dispute**

Employees of timber processor, Metsa Wood, with sites in Lincolnshire and Cheshire began an overtime ban this week and have planned a one-day strike next Thursday. The staff have rejected a low pay offer made by the company. The company supplies timber products to chains such as B&Q.

### **Oil refinery employees in north of England to ballot**

Oil refinery workers employed by Hertel UK at its refinery on Teesside in the north of England are to be balloted for possible strike action by the Unite union. The ballot begins today and will close on June 1.

Hertel provides maintenance and support services for oil giant Conoco Phillips. The Hertel workforce are protesting the refusal of the company to offer a pay rise for the year 2016/17.

### **Norwegian hotel strike now in third week**

The strike by Norwegian hotel and restaurant staff is now in its third week. They are seeking a pay rise and for the right of the union to hold local negotiations with employers. They are organized by the Fellesforbundet trade union federation.

On Tuesday a further 50 hotel and restaurant staff at four sites joined the dispute. Tuesday was an important Norwegian national holiday day.

### **Cypriot port pilot staff hold two-hour walk-out**

Staff working on pilot boats for the Cyprus Ports Authority (CPA) held a two-hour strike on Tuesday. They were protesting the disciplining of CPA employee, Demetris Potsalos. The chief accountant of the CPA, Potsalos had had made statements critical of the organisation.

The Cypriot government is selling off ports as part of its deal for funding to bail out its deficits.

### **Palestinians arrested for holding hunger strike**

Two graduate students were arrested in the Gaza strip on Monday. They had been among a group of around 20 students protesting high levels of unemployment among graduates. They had been holding their protest in a public square in Gaza city for the previous 20 days.

### **South African road workers continue dispute**

Employees at South Africa's National Road Agency (SANRAL) are continuing their weeklong strike to demand of a pay increase, establishment of a provident fund and a thirteenth month cheque. Previous attempts to settle the dispute through the services of the government's conciliation and arbitration agency have failed. Workers are demanding that an attempt by the agency to resolve the matter today comes up with a solution within 48 hours.

Teti, the contractor to SANRAL employing the road workers, is responsible for clearing up after traffic accidents that take place on the country's highways. Demonstrations by the road workers had been violently attacked by the Metro police earlier in their strike.

### **Nigerian Labour organisation divided over fuel price protest**

Nigerian labour organisations have split over a call on workers to strike on Wednesday in protest over the abolition of fuel subsidies. The Nigerian Trades Union Congress (TUC) has rescinded its strike call, along with a faction of the Nigerian Labour Organization (NLO), which has opposed the leadership and opposed the strike call.

On Sunday, they had issued a united strike call, but this was thrown into disarray as the strike date approached. The labour organizations had threatened to bring out the banks, docks, airports, private and public offices and others, as well as larger society.

An injunction has been secured against the strike and anybody compelling workers to strike will be prosecuted. Nigeria is the largest oil producing country in Africa but has to import refined oil for domestic consumption.

### **Nigerian state governor makes "retreat" on wage cut**

The Nigerian Nasarawa state Trade Union Congress and the Nigerian Labour Organization had threatened to call an indefinite strike from Wednesday. It was in response to the state government making a compulsory 35 percent deduction in workers' monthly wages for "development of the state".

The unions had been campaigning for a new national minimum wage and said the deduction was "uncalled for". Latest reports suggest the 48-hour strike has been called off in response to the state governor suspending the 35 percent levy and renewed negotiations with the unions.

### **Nigerian state governor in contempt of court**

The Nigerian state governor of Nandi State is in contempt of court according the Kenyan National Union of Nurses. A court ruling suspended nurses from striking for three weeks encouraging negotiations to take place. One of the proviso's in the ruling was there would be no victimization in the period of the ruling ending May 24. In rejecting this

ruling the governor has removed the nurses from the employment register and refused to pay their April wages and threatened to have them redeployed.

The union suspects the state governor is sabotaging negotiations by victimizing the 200 nurses.

### **Namibian educational instructors threaten strike for fair distribution of pay**

Namibian teaching staff at Katura Youth Enterprise Centre are planning to strike for a fair distribution of wages. Instructors and cleaners say there is an enormous disparity between management's N72, 000 (\$4,500) a month salary and the trainers and nurses remuneration of between N5, 000 (\$310) and N6, 000 monthly (\$380). Teaching staff also complain about the lack of materials, at the government funded training centres, such as textbooks and work overalls.

The staff further complain the intake of pupils far outweigh the ratio of staff, particularly as many of the pupils are those who have dropped out of formal education.



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