

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

3 June 2016

Strikes and protests against labour reforms continue in France

Oil refinery staff at six of the country's eight sites remain on strike in France, leading to severe fuel shortages across the country. Rail strikes continue to affect high-speed, local and services in the Paris area. On Monday, Air France pilots voted to strike, but have yet to set a date. Air traffic control staff belonging to the SNCTA union are due to strike today and stay out until Sunday.

The ongoing strikes and protests are in opposition to the labour reform law being imposed by the Socialist Party government that will erode job protection and make it easier to fire staff.

One-day strike of refuse workers in Italian capital

Staff working for AMA, Rome's waste management authority, struck for 24 hours Monday. The dispute is over longstanding contract issues. Occurring at the height of the tourist season, the strike quickly had an impact. There is only a limited rubbish collection on Sundays, so the backlog from the previous day led to waste mounting up in the streets.

Further strikes in Greece announced

Greek primary school teachers announced they will strike on June 8. This is to protest plans by the Syriza-led government to cut school hours to save money and manage teacher shortages.

POEDIN, the union representing staff in state hospitals, announced it would hold a 24-hour strike the same day.

Drivers and other staff at UK warehouse set to strike

Three quarters of Unite members working at the warehouse in Leicestershire of catalogue retailer Argos have voted to strike June 7.

Warehouse staff and administration will begin a six-day strike. They are opposing plans by Argos to outsource 96 drivers' jobs to haulier Eddie Stobart Ltd., which they say will mean lower pay, worse working conditions and less job security.

Irish care home staff continue protest

A protest by care workers at the Oberstown residential unit for youth offenders in County Dublin, Ireland is continuing. On Tuesday, staff refused to open bedroom doors between 8 a.m. and 12 noon, confining youth to their rooms. Management had to make emergency arrangements to provide food and drink.

The members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union and Impact unions are concerned about safety measures at the unit and inadequate staffing levels. Staff have been assaulted by youth who are detained there because of criminal convictions and challenging behaviour, which has led to high levels of sickness absence.

A meeting between staff and management under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission took place Wednesday.

Dockers strike and threat of strike by airport ground handling staff in Cyprus

Last Friday, Cyprus Port Authority dockers walked out for two hours while a disciplinary hearing against their SYALK union head, Demetris Patsalos, took place. He had made criticisms of the planned privatisation of the port.

Ground handling staff at Larnaca and Paphos airports have threatened to strike over collective agreements that two ground handling companies are trying to impose. The handling staff are represented by the private employees branch of the SEK union.

Breakdown of talks could lead to Norwegian oil production strike

Offshore oil workers in Norway organised by the Industry Energy union could strike after talks with oil the Norwegian Oil and Gas Association broke down Monday. Norway, the biggest oil producer in Western Europe, has been hit by the collapse in crude oil prices.

Producers are taking advantage of the collapse in oil prices to refuse to offer any wage increases. The Industry Energy union represents around 4,000 oil production employees out of a total of 7,500. Talks with two other unions representing offshore employees will continue. The state mediation service is expected to intervene to try to prevent a strike.

General strike in Morocco

The Moroccan Workers' Union along with the Democratic Work Convention, the Democratic Work Federation and the General Moroccan Workers Union took part in a 24-hour strike Tuesday. They also held a sit-in in front of the parliament building in the capital, Rabat.

The strikers are protesting government proposals to change pension entitlement, which would mean increasing the retirement age to 63 from 60 and workers paying more in contributions but receiving poorer benefits.

International Monetary Fund determines pay for civil servants in Malawi

This week civil servants in Malawi demonstrated against an inadequate 15 percent pay offer made by the government.

Placards on the demonstration spelled out demands for a 67 percent pay increase, full pay while on leave, additional hiring of staff and unbiased promotion. Workers are also demanding support for medical costs.

The government claim their pay offer is determined by the International Monetary Fund, which verifies budget spending priorities.

Mauritanian miners strike

Mauritanian miners at the Tasiast gold mine in the Inchiri region are striking for improved wages and conditions. The mine is owned by the Kinross corporation.

They are protesting the difference in their pay and conditions, compared to those of expat workers. They claim management are imposing wage cuts to keep the mine open, saying they have a programme to increase production by 50 percent while cutting costs by half.

The strike, which began May 23, has brought gold production to a halt. Measures to keep the mine operational were carried out by contractors.

Zimbabwe rail workers reject derisory offer

Striking workers at National Railways of Zimbabwe refused to return to work after an offer from management was rejected.

They have been without wages for nearly one-and-a-half years. The Zimbabwe Amalgamated Railways Union says they are demanding six months' pay before they will consider authorising a return to work. Management only offered a flat \$330 payment for workers to return after the union explained they had no money for bus fares to travel to work.

Nigerian union supports state against strikers

A body of trade unions and associations in Ekiti state are attempting to break a strike over pay by civil servants.

These organisations, calling themselves "concerned trade unions," comprises the National Union of Road Transport Workers, Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria, Ajegboro Association, Cooperative Drivers Union, Okada Riders Association and others plan to

organise a rally in support of the state governor. They are urging striking civil servants, owed 15 months wages, to return to work.

The strike was called by the official Nigerian labour bodies, the Trade Union Congress, the National Labour Congress and Joint Negotiating Council.

The "concerned trade unions" are using workers in other Nigerian states having returned to work without being able to gain payment of past wages to cajole Ekiti employees back to work. These unions have signed a petition to persuade Ekiti workers to end the strike, claiming the state does not have the money to pay them. The strikebreaking call comes on top of threats by the governor of "dire consequences" if strikers do not return.

Goal Supermarket in South Africa employ scab labour to undermine strike

Workers at Goal supermarket in Western Cape, South Africa went on strike and protested at the store Saturday. They demanded a 15 percent pay increase and an improvement in their conditions.

The workers were attacked by the company's security guards. As the supermarket staff walked out last week, scabs were brought in to take their place.

Although the Food and Allied Workers Union have reduced their pay claim to 13 percent, the company is still only offering 6 percent. A worker complained they were given contracts to sign without being given time to read them, and wages were paid without pay slips. Workers complain that when they take on extra responsibilities they do not get extra pay.

Platinum miners strike ruled illegal by South African courts

Platinum miners walked off the job at Sibanye Gold in Kroondal, South Africa on Saturday. They are demanding improvements in allowances for undertaking drilling operations, transport and travelling, and safety bonuses. A court ruling deemed the strike illegal, with the union facing repercussions if miners did not return to work on Monday.

Sixty-five percent of the 10,000 employees are members of the Association of Miners and Construction Union (AMCU), which conceded to the court ruling.

The union and management are in negotiations over transport for night shift workers. Sibanye Gold has only recently expanded into platinum mining and is in the process of finalising a deal to take over Anglo Platinum's Rustenburg plant. The deal is part of a process of restructuring in the South African mining industry.

South African Metro workers lose jobs for striking

One hundred thirty members of the South African Transport Workers Union (SATWU) have been told they will not get their jobs back at Metrorail Western Cape. The company claims the employees, who began an unofficial strike on April 7, were linked to a spate of arson attacks on railway carriages, but have presented no evidence. Police are investigating the incidents.

A total of 35 carriages have been attacked. Metrorail returned to court to have the strike deemed illegal as a result of the arson attacks. The union

originally received a notice of a protected strike, but Metrorail had it overturned on the first day of the strike.



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