

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

10 June 2016

## French rail strike continues

The strike by French rail staff against labour reforms imposed by the Hollande-led Socialist Party government has continued this week.

Following talks on Monday between rail company SNCF representative and the railworkers unions, a deal on working hours and conditions is being put to the members of the unions involved.

The SNCF came under government pressure to get an agreement ahead of the European football tournament starting Friday. However, Hollande is still insisting the assault on workers' conditions will not be withdrawn. Two unions, Sud-Rail and the CGT, have allowed their members to continue striking against the deal, but two other unions have recommended it to their members. Only some 10 percent of the workforce are absent, according to press reports, yet train travel continues to be disrupted. Strikes by refuse workers are also continuing.

## Proposed action by French airline pilots under pressure

Airline pilots working for the French Air France-KLM company are due to begin a four-day strike on Saturday over pay and the company's restructuring plans. The action is planned by the three unions representing airline pilots.

The airline staff are coming under pressure to call off the strike, which would coincide with the beginning of the European football tournament.

## Widespread protests hit Greece

On Wednesday, doctors, nurses and paramedics across Greece held a 24-hour strike. They were joined by dockers in the country's main ports of Piraeus and Thessaloniki and by teachers. In Athens, transport was hit as underground rail staff came out on strike along with tram and overground rail employees.

The strikes are against the Syriza-led government's agreement to impose even greater austerity measures on behalf of the European Union, including the slashing of pensions. ADEDY, the Greek public-sector union, called on its members in the civil service to come out in support of the other strikers.

Demonstrations were held in Athens, and teachers marched on the parliament building.

## Cleaners walk out at London JP Morgan Chase

Cleaners working for the Thames Cleaning and Support Services, which is under contract for a building that includes the offices of the bank JP Morgan and other financial companies, walked off the job on Wednesday.

The workers are on indefinite strike, demanding to be paid the London living wage of £9.40 an hour and are demanding recognition of their union, the United Voices of the World (UVW).

According to UVW, when Thames Cleaning and Support Services took over the contract to clean the building earlier this year, they sacked half the workforce, many with long years of service and in contravention of TUPE regulations. Last week, the company applied to the High Court for an injunction to stop the cleaners' action. The injunction failed, but the court ruled pickets must not chant within 10 metres of the entrance.

## Bus drivers in UK city of Leeds in dispute

Bus drivers working for Leeds First Bus at the Hunslet Park and Bramley depots are due to hold a one-day strike on Monday June 13. The drivers, members of the Unite union, are taking the action in pursuit of a pay claim.

## Museum of Wales staff to consider new offer

Staff at the Museum of Wales have been holding ongoing strikes at weekends to oppose the ending of premium payments for weekends and bank holidays for new staff. They are members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS).

The employer has said it will make a lump sum of two years' premium payments in an effort to resolve the dispute. Museum of Wales and PCS representatives throughout its seven sites are meeting to discuss the new offer.

## Irish child care advisers walk out

Staff working for the state-funded Childminding Ireland walked out on strike on Tuesday. Represented by the Impact union, the staff offer advice and are responsible for registering child minders.

They took the action in response to the decision of Childminding Ireland

to make five of the staff redundant as part of a restructuring exercise. The union accuses the organisation of failing to hold meaningful discussions with the Workplace Relations Commission in an attempt to resolve the matter.

### **Irish psychiatric nurses vote to strike**

Psychiatric nurses in Ireland have voted by a nearly 90 percent majority to take action, up to and including a strike. The Psychiatric Nurses Association (PNA), which has a membership of around 5,000, held the ballot to oppose staff shortages and lack of mental health resources.

The PNA board met on Thursday to discuss the form and date for the action to begin, but as of the time of writing this article, neither was known.

### **Belgian prison wardens vote to continue dispute**

Prison wardens at Namur prison in Belgium voted on June 3 to continue their strike. A national strike of prison wardens broke out at the end of April over severe austerity measures being imposed by the right-wing government of Charles Michel, which would cut staff and pay by around 10 percent.

Pierre Trainito, a delegate from the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (CSC), told the press, "The general feeling is that we did not strike for nothing, so we continue."

Striking wardens picketing Namur prison have been supported by striking rail and bus workers.

### **Icelandic government intervenes to end air traffic controllers' action**

The Icelandic government has called for emergency measures to end the air traffic controllers' dispute. Air traffic controllers have been carrying out an overtime ban and refusal to train new staff for the last two months in pursuit of a 60 percent pay increase.

The government directed the two sides in the dispute to reach an agreement by June 24; otherwise, an arbitration court would be ordered to adjudicate on the dispute.

### **Dutch Easyjet pilots set to strike**

Pilots and cabin crew working for Easyjet, based in Amsterdam, represented by the VNV union, have announced they will go on strike in the coming weeks. They are taking the action to gain an improved collective bargaining agreement over sick pay leave, heavy workloads and employer contributions to their pensions.

### **Walkout by Egyptian textile employees**

Employees of the Nile Cotton Ginning Company (NCGC) in the Egyptian city of Giza walked out on Sunday. They were protesting nonpayment of wages for the past five months, with the company being taken back into public ownership. The strikers held a protest outside the offices of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. NCGC was sold off to investors in 1997, who then began to asset strip the company.

### **Malawi council workers strike over unpaid wages**

Council workers employed by Karonga council, Malawi, have gone on strike demanding unpaid wages. Their demands also include the removal of the finance and administration directors. A similar campaign took place last October over wages and conditions, with a call for the district commissioner and her associates to be removed. An official for the council laid responsibility for the late wages on natural disasters (the area suffered flooding at the beginning of 2016). The spokesmen then went on to say the councils are suffering as a result of government severely cutting back on their budgets.

### **Nigerian resident doctors strike**

Nigerian resident doctors began a nationwide strike on Thursday over the government's refusal to respond to their demands. Initially, some institutions will be exempt, but if the government fails to meet their demands, they will also be called out on June 16. The issues include unpaid wages, other accumulated arrears and agreements with the federal government that have not been implemented.

The strike, called by the National Association of Resident Doctors, was initially due to have followed a five-day warning strike on May 9 but was called off.

### **Nigerian union officials arrested**

Eight protesting organisers of Nigeria's National Labour Congress (NLC) were arrested on June 2. The protest was over the proposed privatisation of schools in Oyo state. The NLC is claiming the legal right to organise protests, but state authorities denounced their action as breaching laws on peace and vandalism of public property. Those arrested were denied bail release on the basis that they did not meet the court's bail terms criteria.

### **South Sudan lecturers' strike continues**

Lecturers at five South Sudan public universities have been on strike for more than two weeks over a backlog of unpaid wages and allowances.

The higher education minister has demanded they return to work or face dismissal, although they have not been paid for three months. They say they will demand the resignation of the minister if he does not retract his threats and will also demand the resignation of certain vice chancellors as a result of their intimidating manner towards them. As well as unpaid

wages, staff have gone 10 months without being paid their transport, housing and medical allowances.

### **Strike of art and culture centre staff in South Africa**

Staff in art and culture centres in South Africa came out on strike June 3. More than 100 workers at four centres run by the Mmabana Arts-Culture and Sports Foundation in the North West withdrew their labour to demand a pay increase and retraction of a worker re-evaluation, which resulted in wage cuts. They are demanding to be brought in line with pay increases given to other public-sector employees.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) says the budget for the foundation has been reduced by R10million (US\$680,000).



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