

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

1 July 2016

Belgian general strike against austerity measures

The Belgian Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (CSC) together with the General Federation of Belgian Workers (FGTB), held a one-day general strike on June 24.

The strike was called in protest of the austerity measures being imposed by the right-wing Charles Michel government. The action led to the disruption of transportation across the country. In the south of the country, transport was heavily impaired. The strike also hit airlines, resulting in cancellations and delays at most airports.

Norwegian oil workers threaten action

Around 750 Norwegian oil and gas production workers are set to strike Saturday. Unions representing the workers said they would walk off the job if a wage deal were not settled by Friday. The unions include the Industri Energi, the SAFE union and Lederne.

Talks between the unions and the oil and gas companies, mediated by a government representative, took place yesterday and today. Depending on the outcome today, the strike is scheduled to begin Saturday. If the strike goes ahead, it could ultimately involve over 7,000 production workers.

Oil prices rose on Tuesday in response to the strike threat.

UK lecturers hold series of one-day strikes

University and college lecturers at 44 institutions across the UK held one-day strikes this week. They are members of the University and College Union (UCU).

The strikes are part of an ongoing protest against a 1.1 percent pay offer. The UCU estimates lecturers have suffered a nearly 15 percent loss in spending power since 2009.

Staff at most of the universities struck on Thursday when more than 30 institutions, including the University of Cambridge, the London School of Economics and Queens University Belfast, were affected.

English and Welsh teachers to hold one-day walkout

Teachers in England and Wales are holding a one-day strike on July 5. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) members voted for the action by

more than a 90 percent majority, albeit on a low turnout. They are protesting cuts in budgets for education and high workloads. The action is expected to hit primary schools particularly hard, with areas such as Leeds, Manchester and Nottingham expecting high levels of support for the strike.

Further protests in France against labour law changes

Protests were held in cities across France Tuesday against the Socialist Party (PS) government's despised labor law proposals. The protests took place after the PS backed down from threats to ban demonstrations in Paris. Tens of thousands of people marched in the capital.

Staff at the Eiffel Tower in Paris struck for the second time in two weeks. The strike led to the closure of the tower to tourists for the day. Normally the tower attracts around 20,000 visitors each day.

The protections granted by the existing Labour Code are to be replaced and the current 35-hour working week is being lengthened. Under the new provisions, the maximum number of hours worked at one job will go from 44 hours weekly and 10 hours per day to 48 or 60 hours per week and 12 hours per day in some cases.

Greek supermarket staff protest store's bankruptcy filing

Employees of the Marinopoulos supermarket chain in Thessaloniki protested outside a store on Tuesday after it was announced the company was filing for bankruptcy. According to reports, the chain owes more than a €1 billion. Marinopoulos employs more than 12,000 nationwide whose jobs are now at risk.

Irish mint employees begin action over pay negotiations

Nine employees at the mint facility of the Central Bank of Ireland, based in Sandford in the south of Dublin, began a work-to-rule Tuesday. They are members of the Unite union and the Technical, Engineering and Electrical Union and responsible for maintaining the machinery that prints Irish bank notes.

The issues in dispute include promotional opportunities, differential pay rates and lower pay rates for new starters. The issue was referred to the Workplace Relations Commission who adjudicated on the dispute and made proposals. These were rejected by the workers who then began

industrial action.

Workers threaten a further strike on July 11-12.

Suspended Egyptian food workers reinstated

Twenty-one workers employed by Egypt Foods who had been suspended have now been reinstated. The reinstatement followed a meeting between the company director, workers representatives and the minister of manpower.

They were suspended for holding a demonstration on June 15 outside the factory, demanding a pay rise, an annual bonus and for some managers to be dismissed. On June 19, following the suspensions, 1,500 Egypt Food employees at the factory, in the Quisna district of Menufiya, walked out, demanding their reinstatement.

South African postal workers threaten walkout

A section of South African post office employees have threatened to strike this week. The Information and Communications Union declared last week it intended to strike over unfair labour practices.

The union is protesting the practice of employing workers as casuals who, in some cases, have worked for the company as long as 15 years.

The Information and Communication union represents 2,000 employees, some 10 percent of the workforce. Management claim the strike will not have much of an impact on its operations, although the utility is in need of R3.5 billion (US\$240 million) to secure its future.

Catering workers strike at South African airlines

Some 550 catering staff providing food for South African airlines stopped work June 24 to protest alleged bullying. The workers are employed by LSG Sky Chefs.

The three unions representing the staff, the National Union of Metalworkers and two transport unions claim that a senior manager of the company should be disciplined for the ill treatment of workers. Although the strike was given protected status (the right to strike) the company tried to get a court ruling against it.

Another grievance of the staff is that newly employed workers are brought in at a better rate than exiting staff. Reports claim that some workers were paid R3000 (US\$205) a month after several years' service, less than the rate paid to new interns.

Nigerian court intervenes to stop health workers' strike

Several Nigerian unions have been blocked from striking by a Nigerian National Industrial Court (NIC) ruling.

The unions calling for the strike comprise a large section of health and higher education workers. The courts justification for effectively approving the government's appeal to stop the strike was that it was saving the lives of the Nigerian public. The injunction follows a week of

strikes that paralysed much of the public medical services, including pharmacy. The strike is a result of broken agreements by the federal governments going back to February.

The court ruling was made prior to a decision on a substantive motion put to it. Although the NIC could not find evidence to enforce the ruling, it still ruled to defer the strike.

Nigeria's Joint Health Sector Unions (JOHESU) refused to call their strike off and refused further talks with the federal government. JOHESU said it would strike indefinitely if the government does not honour agreements signed by Goodluck Jonathan, the previous president.

Hospital management at Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) did not impose a government ruling to sack striking resident doctors in Lagos state hospitals. The nurses are in dispute with LUTH management over their renegeing on promises over promotions.

Nigerian workers accuse union leadership of betrayal

Workers in Ekita state, Nigeria, are protesting the betrayal of their union in selling out a compromise demand. An organisation calling itself the Enlightened Workers Forum (EWF) criticised the Trade Union Congress, the Nigeria Labour Congress and the Joint Negotiating Council for calling off the strike of state workers.

The workers had been striking over six months of arrears of wages, but returned to work after the union bodies agreed with management to the payment of just one month's arrears.

After accusing the union's leadership of being paid off with a N10 million (\$35,400) bribe, an EWF spokesman said: "Negotiating one month salary on their behalf after about five weeks strike is not only anti-worker but also criminal."

Namibian youth trainers strike over wage disparities

Youth workers in Windhoek and Ondangwa, Namibia, walked out demanding improved salaries and better provision of equipment for students.

The staff, who work for the state-owned Katatura Youth Enterprise Centres, demand a 12 percent wage increase and a yearly five percent appreciation, as well as an increase in housing and transport allowances and 70 percent medical cover. Workers responsible for training complained there was a big disparity between their wages and that of management. The top manager earns 12 times the pay of an instructor.

Management are refusing to negotiate with staff and have not accepted their petition. The General Secretary of the workers union, the Namibia National Teachers Union, ordered his members back to work, and apologised to the trainees.

Namibian workers strike over breach of work agreements

Namibian construction workers employed by the Italian company, Salini Spa, downed tools Monday. The employees, who are building a dam, accuse the company of not adhering to a labour agreement they signed and unfairly sacking workmates including union reps.

The 400 builders manned gates at the site stopping all deliveries from

entering. The company tried to get an injunction to have the strike ruled illegal.

Workers have a whole raft of demands about safety, wages, and contract agreements and are seeking the removal of several managers.

Kenyan workers demand employers implement ruling

Twenty thousand Kenyan tea plantation workers struck June 26 at the estate of James Finlay Tea Company. The two-hour protest was over salaries and allowance disputes.

The Kenya Plantations and Agricultural workers union assistant general secretary Meshack Khisa said, “We have started a strike that will last until the employer pays 30 percent salary increase to our members as ordered by the [Employment and Labour Relations] Court...”

The Kenya Tea Growers Association (KTGA) has defied the court ruling. The KTGA represents James Finlay Kenya Limited, Sotik Highlands Tea Estate, Williamson Tea Limited, and Kapchorua Tea Company Limited.

The court ruled there should be a salary increase of 30 percent, retirement at 60, one rest day a week, medical allowance of sh. 30,000 (\$295) and baggage allowance of sh. 30,000 upon termination of employment.



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