

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

24 May 2019

Italian and French dockers refuse to load ship in protest at Saudi Arabia war in Yemen; strikes and protests continue in South Africa

Europe

Italian, French dockers refuse to load ship in protest at Saudi Arabia war in Yemen

On Monday, dockers in the Italian port of Genoa refused to load two generators on board a Saudi Arabian ship bound for Yemen. The ship left the Belgian port of Antwerp earlier in the month with weaponry for the war.

Protests at the French port of Le Havre meant the ship was unable to pick up a further contingent of arms.

In Genoa, dockers refused to load the generators registered for civilian use, arguing they could be diverted to aid the Saudi Arabian war effort, which has led to high casualties and the threat of famine in the Yemen. Ten million people are surviving on emergency food relief.

The Saudi-led US backed war on Yemen is now in its fifth year, launched after Houthi rebels drove out the corrupt government of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, a puppet of Riyadh and Washington.

Air controllers strike in Scotland

Air controllers at six regional airports in Scotland came out on 24-hour strike at midnight on Thursday. The airports affected are Benbecula, Dundee, Inverness, Kirkwall, Stornoway and Sumburgh.

The Prospect union members are demanding a pay increase of at least 10 percent to achieve parity with the private sector. Employer Hial, owned by the Scottish government, claimed it is abiding by government pay policy.

The controllers have been on a work-to-rule since April.

Wildcat walkout by Belgian air traffic control staff

Belgian air traffic control staff working for air navigation firm Skeyes at Brussels airport staged a wildcat walkout on May 16, from 9.30 am till 1pm. The protest was against poor working conditions and staff shortages. The stoppage led to numerous flight cancellations and delays.

Twenty-four-hour strike by Greek hospital staff

Hospital staff across Greece held a 24-hour strike on May 16. They were protesting the Syriza-led government's cuts in health spending and the imposition of increased charges on patients for medication and other health provision. The National Federation of Public Hospital Staff members also held a march to the Ministry of Health in Athens.

Cypriot public sector workers protest temporary contracts

Hundreds of public sector workers, employed on temporary contracts, protested outside the Cypriot presidential palace on May 16. The third day of protests was called to demand permanent contracts.

A delegation of three of the protestors, including an Isotita trade union leader, met with a presidential representative. The union has launched 100 labour tribunal cases in its campaign. Around 6,000 central government workers are on temporary contracts, with 11,000 in other public sector organisations.

Cypriot power workers ballot to strike

Power workers employed by the Electricity Authority of Cyprus are being balloted for industrial action, including strikes. Balloting ends May 30.

The two main grievances relate to plans to increase pay deductions for health insurance, from its current less than two percent to nearly three percent in June next year.

They are also opposing plans to reduce access to private healthcare and the government's backpedaling providing compensation for benefit and salary cuts imposed in 2012.

Irish health workers vote overwhelmingly for strike action

Around 17,000 health support workers employed at 36 health facilities across Ireland have voted overwhelmingly for strike action. They are protesting the Irish government's refusal to implement the findings of a job evaluation scheme that would have led to increased pay. Those affected include catering, portering and cleaning staff and health care assistants.

Some members of the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) would have been entitled to additional payments of up to £2,000 under the evaluation scheme.

In a separate dispute, ambulance staff belonging to the National Ambulance Service Representation Association (Nasra), affiliated to the Psychiatric Nurses Association PNA, protested outside the Irish parliament on May 15.

Nasra is demanding the Irish Health Service Executive recognise its right to represent ambulance staff. Around 500 ambulance workers are to hold two 24-hour strikes, one in the week beginning May 27 and one in the week beginning June 3. They previously held a series of 10-hour strikes. The Irish Health Service Executive only recognises the larger SIPTU union in negotiations with ambulance staff.

Outsourced workers at northwest England hospitals to strike

UK hospital workers carrying out catering, portering and cleaning roles at the Liverpool Royal and Broad Green hospitals on Merseyside are to strike on May 30.

The workers, employed by ISS, are demanding pay in line with staff employed directly by the National Health Service. They are on the minimum wage rate of £8.21, falling short by 82p an hour of the lowest NHS pay rate, amounting to £1,600 a year for full-time staff. Around 500 Unison members voted by a near majority for the action.

Strike by workers at plastic manufacturer in northwest England

Around 40 UK workers at the Kirby based Colloids Limited factory began an all-out strike Monday. The factory produces plastic products for use in the automotive, aerospace and construction sectors.

The Unite union members are taking the action in support of a colleague, George Gore, who was sacked in February over alleged health and safety breaches. Gore was a Unite union representative at the site. The strikers say they will remain on strike until Gore is reinstated.

Outsourced central UK government workers strike at two London sites

On Tuesday, workers employed by outsource company Interserve at the UK government's Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London began a two-day strike.

Meanwhile, outsourced staff at the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Department in London began a four-day strike, also Tuesday. They are employed by contractors ISS and Aramark.

The Public and Commercial Services union members are demanding to be paid the London Living Wage figure, currently set at £10.55 an hour.

ISS staff have also been hit by a change in their pay cycle, leaving many out of pocket. A food bank was set up for ISS workers because of the resulting severe circumstances.

Security workers strike at Luton airport

Around 120 UK security workers at Luton airport in southeast England were to begin a 12-day strike on Thursday. The workers are responsible for baggage checks, searches and general security.

The Unite union members are protesting imposed changes in their shift patterns. The changes mean that they will have to work an extra 15 days a year and only get nine free weekends annually. They held a series of strikes earlier this month, which led to big flight delays.

Support at Sellafield nuclear plant in England strike against company/union offer

Around 180 security guards, catering staff and cleaners at the nuclear reprocessing plant at Sellafield in northwest England began a 10-day strike Sunday. It followed a strike earlier this month.

The Unite union members employed by outsourcing company Mitie had rejected a pay offer of £8.21 an hour, which had been accepted by the GMB union, the only union Mitie recognises.

Workers at hospitals in Bradford, England balloted for strike

Workers providing portering and cleaning services at Bradford hospitals began voting on Monday. The Unison union members are opposed to the hospital trust's plans to set up a separate company to provide cleaning and portering services. As employees of a separate company, workers would lose protections they have through being employed by the National Health Service.

Unite union calls off strike by airline food supplier workers at London Heathrow airport

The Unite union called off a proposed five-day strike due to begin Wednesday by 80 specialist drivers. The workers deliver airline food at London's Heathrow airport.

Employer Alpha LSG has introduced new rosters. The union called off the strike after Alpha LSG came up with another proposal on the roster changes that will be voted on by the drivers.

Middle East

Protests by retired security and military personnel in Lebanon

Hundreds of retired Lebanese security and military staff protested outside the Lebanese government headquarters on Monday. They were protesting Lebanese government plans to cut their pensions as part of budgets cuts. Security forces used water cannon to break up the protests.

Africa

South African platinum miners sacked for striking over benefit changes

South African platinum mining company Amplats sacked 640 of its workforce after they came out on strike over benefit changes.

The company was handed a notice of intention to strike by the General Industrial Workers Union of South Africa (GIWUSA) on May 9. The union is demanding the reinstatement of its previous medical plan. The medical plan was changed when Amplats took over the Motolo mine from Glencore mining.

Although the union approached the Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration, Amplats got an injunction from the labour court. The strike call was made illegal on May 10, but it still went ahead May 12.

Based on new labour laws, the company sacked the miners, half of its underground workforce. Strikers were given until Tuesday this week to appeal against the sackings.

South African platinum mining companies are concerned that the wildcat strikes are taking place on the eve of contract negotiations with the mining unions.

According to the World Platinum Investment Council, there is an oversupply of platinum by 375,000 ounces.

South African gold miners stage protest sit-in protest over wages and conditions

Sixty-nine miners at South African China Precious Metal Company Orkney mine began an underground sit-in on Saturday over wages and conditions.

A contract was agreed between the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the gold mines local management for an eight percent wage increase. The deal was vetoed by the Chinese mine owners saying there should be no wage increase.

Wage negotiations have been underway since September and have been overshadowed by the threat of a shutdown since December.

The NUM agreed to the eight percent pay increase with management conditional on production levels and tied to job grading, but the miners opposed it.

South African eThekweni municipal workers protest casual employment

Casual workers employed by the eThekweni municipality held a city centre demonstration in Durban, South Africa, demanding permanent employment.

Employees at the province's refuse department where many are on temporary contracts for years are demanding to be made permanent. A recent court ruling established the right of workers to be employed on the books if they have been continually employed at a company for over three months.

eThekweni council workers were involved in wildcat strikes at the beginning of May over privileged pay to ex-military freedom fighters. The strike was called off on May 7 after intervention by two unions.

A delegation of workers handed in a memorandum of demands to the City Hall Thursday last week. Rubbish continued to pile up on the streets in many areas.

South African mine products workers strike for bonus payments

Workers at the Videx Mining Products Company in Wadeville, South Africa went on strike May 15 demanding bonuses for meeting production targets. Videx supplies roof support structures to the large gold and platinum operations in South Africa.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) members say they deserve a bonus for achieving the company's schedules.

NUMSA say they are opposed to targets, but where they do exist workers should be paid extra. Videx approached the labour court for a strike injunction, but the motion was rejected. Three-quarters of the 800 workforce are out on indefinite strike.

Teachers sacked for protesting unpaid wages at South African private school

Teachers were sacked last week when they carried out a sit-in in the staff room at a private school in Morningside, Durban. They have not been paid in some cases since June, others since January.

The school reneged on its promise to pay workers on April 30, blaming lack of sponsorship and the failure of parents to pay school fees. The school employs 21 teachers covering 80 enrolled students at R5000 (\$350) a month.

The National Professional Teachers' Organization of South Africa is to take the complaint to the Arbitration services.

Ugandan teachers strike in response to reneged pay deal

Ugandan teachers struck Monday to protest a second phase pay increase not being honoured.

A Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) was signed in June last year, and although the government honoured the first of a three-phase agreement, it failed to finance the second phase increase due in February.

The Uganda National Teachers Union, covering teachers and other public service workers, gave a 90-day notice of strike action, which came to an end last Sunday, with a national strike starting Monday.

The teachers' strike takes place a week before the pupils return to school on May 27.

Several other public service workers were included in the CBA and are threatening to join the teachers. The government said it cannot afford to pay the rest of the increase.

Ugandan air medical doctors strike for equal pay

Ugandan African Air Rescue (AAR) doctors came out on strike May 17 for equal pay with their colleagues in the rest of the hospital service.

AAR Holdings doctors are demanding a 30 percent increase from two to three million shillings (\$530 – \$795). Although the management has said they have agreed to pay the increase next week, the doctors will not return to work until they have it.

Medical workers and teachers strike in Sudan; air traffic controllers threaten to close airspace

Sudanese doctors are striking to protest brutality meted out on their colleagues at the Ed Damazin Royal Hospital by the military. Several hospitals are on strike in the Blue Nile state in support of the demand that those who committed the violence are arrested and are calling for protection from further attacks.

Teachers are also striking to demand better education provision. Air aviation controllers are threatening to close Sudanese air space.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact