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Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

30 May 2014

Europe

Dock workers strike at UK port

The 24-strong workforce employed by the Swedish owned SCA Logistics at the Port of Tilbury in south-east England began a two-day strike on Tuesday. The strike was in response to the employer's plans to bring in zero hour contracts for its staff.

A UNITE union regional officer said of the proposal; "We will be turning the clock back 50 years... when you had to rely on the tap on the shoulder to see if you had work for the day in the docks."

The union had previously signed an agreement with the company allowing it to use a proportion of casual agency workers.

Protest at construction employment agency office in Northampton UK

Building workers' union UCATT, together with UNITE union members and campaigners from the Blacklist Support Group, occupied the British office of the Danish-owned employment

agency, Atlanco Rimec in Northampton (near London), May 23. Atlanco Rimec supplies agency labour to British and Irish construction companies.

A Danish TV programme broadcast last week accused the company of maintaining a secret blacklist of workers who joined a trade union.

The occupation was part of a national day of action to protest tax scams and blacklisting at construction sites in the UK. Protests took place at sites in London, Newcastle, Manchester, Glasgow and Cardiff.

Strike of Norwegian public sector workers averted

A nationwide strike of public sector workers in Norway, including teachers, which was due to begin Monday, was averted following overnight talks which began Sunday. An announcement was made early Monday morning that following the talks an agreement had been reached.

The 50,000 employees working for the city of Oslo had separate negotiations, but after the settlement by the public sector workers they also settled.

Details of the settlement were not spelled out in press reports. However, some comments gave an indication of the concessions agreed by the unions. *The News in English, Views and News from Norway* website spoke of teachers having to accept “that they spend more time at school instead of taking work home with them.” Another comment that hinted at acceptance of performance pay stated; “competence will be rewarded.”

Aerospace workers in UK vote to strike

Around 200 staff employed by the Canadian-owned Magellan aerospace company in Wrexham, Wales have voted to take action over pay. They rejected the company’s recent three-year offer, voting 92 percent for strike action and 95 percent for action short of a strike. The result was announced this week.

Middle East

Sudanese port workers strike

Workers of the Southern Port in Port Sudan began an open-ended strike on Saturday. Port Sudan is in the Sudanese Red Sea State. The strike is in support of an on-going campaign to oppose the sale of four historical school buildings in Port Sudan.

The Red Sea State government is planning to use the sites of the historical schools as investment projects. The chairman of a group organised to oppose the sale was told to report to police the same day. He is accused of organising a disturbance at a previous rally to oppose the sale of the schools.

In a separate dispute, employees of the Containers Transportation Department at the Southern Port also began an open ended strike last Saturday. Their demands include a pay increase and an end to the use of temporary contracts. Their action quickly led to containers piling up.

Turkish workers demonstrate to oppose subcontracting system

Several trade union bodies, including DISK, the Confederation of Turkish Labour Unions, the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions and the Turkish Union of Engineers and Architects Chambers held a protest, Sunday 25 May in the Kadikoy district of Istanbul.

They were protesting the increase number of workers employed in subcontracting, temporary working (taseron) schemes. The number on such schemes has increased seven fold since 2002, so that today 2.5 million workers are involved, with nearly half employed by local authority municipalities. They accused the increased use of taseron workers for the deterioration in pay and conditions and lack of health and safety measures.

Many of the miners at the Soma mine who lost their lives in the recent mine disaster were employed as taseron workers. Several surviving Soma miners addressed the demonstration.

Turkish workers strike over construction site death

Around 2,000 construction workers working on the Maslak 1453 construction site went on strike Tuesday, following the death of a worker when an iron bar fell on him. Maslak 1453 is a major up-market shopping and leisure project being developed in Istanbul.

They were angry that an ambulance belonging to the company was not on standby at the site and able to offer assistance.

Turkish miners at Soma vent their anger against union

Miners from the Soma mine where 301 miners died from carbon monoxide poisoning had been protesting against the failure of the Mine Workers' Union to uphold safety conditions.

Following several days of protest outside the union headquarters in Soma, on Monday the miners attempted to enter the union building. They had been calling for union officials to step down. Following the attempt to storm the building, union leader Tamer Kucukgencay offered his resignation. Speaking to the press one miner explained, "Either they will resign or we will. The union has never been on our side...If they had done their jobs, these incidents might not have happened."

Another added, "Whenever there are elections in the union, they put the name they want in an envelope and vote him in. Whoever the company says is voted in. If anybody objects they fire him. We will resign together."

Africa

Kenyan university lecturers set to resume strike

Lecturers at Kenyan universities are set to resume strike action over unpaid salaries increments. Twenty-five thousand lecturers and university workers plan to strike next week if Sh3.7 billion (\$42m), as part of Sh7 billion (\$80m) wages increment settlement, is not paid.

A one-week strike earlier in the year was called off after an agreement was signed, on March 19, but the Vice Chancellors have not implemented it. A Kenyan University Staff Union representative said the agreement is a legal document and it has been deposited with the court.

Zimbabwean transport workers blocked from taking action

Angry workers at Zimbabwe United Passenger Company (ZUPCO) were restrained from going on strike over unpaid wages last Thursday by their works committee, which warned the strike would be illegal.

The workers had received only half of their March wages and no wages for April and were complaining over withdrawn allowances. Workers were forced onto unpaid leave in March and maternity leave had been converted also into unpaid leave.

Workers were angry that the company was still hiring staff whilst they were not receiving their wages. Management refused to address the angry workforce, saying it would only speak to the works committee.

South African food workers strike

Members of the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) in the South African sugar industry came out on strike Tuesday for improved wages and conditions. FAWU is demanding an 11.5 percent wage increase, while the United Association of South Africa (UASA), also representing sugar workers, was willing to settle for the 8.5 percent offer from the industry.

Members of FAWU are demanding a reduction in the working week from 43 to 40 hours, a better housing subsidy and an end to fixed term contracts they say are exploitative. There are around 5,000 such contracts in the industry.

Some members of UASA have been applying to join FAWU after their union called off action. FAWU represents 2,700 workers and UASA has 1,500 members, which negotiate under the Sugar Bargaining Council. FAWU national organiser, Simphiwe Dhlomo, said the strike would continue indefinitely.

Tanzania and Zambia rail workers ordered back to work

Rail workers for the Tanzanian and Zambian rail authority, Tazara, have been ordered back to work by a court ruling. The railway workers are out on strike demanding the payment of their last four months' pay and a guarantee of future salary payments.

The rail authority has sued the railway workers for being out on strike illegally. The Tanzanian government says it has paid its share of the rail authority wages for February and April, but the Zambian part of the authority has not paid their share, i.e., March and May wages.

Under an earlier agreement the Tanzanian government agreed to pay the February and April outstanding salaries, while Zambia would pay March and May.

Workers vowed at the outset of their strike they would not return to work unless they were paid the whole wages owing to them and have assurances for the future. The Tanzanian Railway Workers Union spokesman said, "The workers have gone hungry since February. They have survived on borrowed food from shops and some have already been taken to local government offices to answer charges of unsettled debts."