

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

8 July 2005

Europe

Air France workers strike

On July 1, Air France workers at the Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris struck for more than three hours to protest understaffing and to demand a pay increase. Two trade unions called the action. The strike resulted in the delays of 30 flights for around 20 minutes.

An estimated 300 employees were involved, including check-in staff, runway employees and boarding controllers. The following day, the workers voted to extend the strike until July 6.

Bus drivers strike in South London

Bus drivers employed by Centra Buses in South London struck for 24 hours on July 1. This was the latest action in their ongoing dispute over pay and conditions. Previous 24-hour strikes were held on May 9-10 and June 24-25. The drivers are members of the Rail Maritime and Transport union.

Management at Centra is also attempting to impose a “zero hours” contract and “flexible location working.” Under a “zero hours” contract a worker can legally be told at the end of a shift they are working one day what shift they are to work the next day. Under “flexible location working” bus drivers can be sent, in their own time, to any location around the country to drive buses for the company.

Union regional organiser Bobby Law said, “Our members will be on strike for a basic £500 weekly wage, equal contracts with equal pay for all employees, no zero-hours contracts, adequate annual leave, sick-pay from day one of employment and full rostered earnings for victims of assaults at work.”

Food manufacturer staff in East London continue strike

Striking workers at Ambala Foods in Stratford, East London continued their ongoing dispute by holding two 24-hour strikes last week. The members of the Transport and General Workers Union are demanding a pay increase and protesting alleged bullying by management.

During the latest strikes, the eleventh of the dispute, an estimated 50 workers participated. The workers have held regular strikes on Thursday and Friday each week.

The Ambala workers’ dispute began in April when 93 percent of staff voted to strike. They initially demanded a £50 a week pay rise to compensate for having worked for three years without any pay increases. Ambala Foods produces Indian

sweets for restaurants and specialist shops.

Middle East

32,000 Israeli workers declare dispute

A dispute was declared July 4 by 32,000 workers, including employees of Bikur Holim Hospital, defence industries and the Interior Ministry. Following a two-week hiatus period, the workers may legally launch a strike if a settlement is not reached. The majority of the workers involved—30,000—are employed by the defence industry, including the Dimona and Nahal Sorek nuclear facilities, the Defence Ministry, Israeli Defence Forces civilian employees, Rafael and Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI). They fear layoffs and firings at IAI.

Around 1,400 of the potential strikers are employed by the Interior Ministry and they are protesting unilateral changes in the population registry section. The Bikur Holim Hospital employees fear the planned sale of the hospital will threaten their jobs.

Workers at Israeli supermarket fight store closures

Staff at the Clubmarket supermarket chain have asked the Histadrut labour federation for permission to declare a work dispute due to what they claim are management’s plans to close up to 10 stores, fire 60 workers and cut the pay of an additional 110 staff.

Clubmarket employs 3,700 workers at 117 stores across the country.

Albert Asor, the Workers’ Committee chair, said the workers are also upset by the supermarket chain’s recent practice of transferring certain supermarket departments, such as produce or meat, to franchisees—meaning that those departments’ workers are employed by the franchisee rather than by Clubmarket. This violates Clubmarket’s collective labour agreement, he said.

Yemeni doctors and pharmacists on strike

Protests continued this week across Yemen, as the Executive Bureau of the Yemeni Physicians’ and Pharmacists’ Syndicate (EBYPS) urged all doctors to remain united in their demands for increased salary levels. The current round of protests began on June 24 and doctors and pharmacists are threatening a complete strike if their demands are not met.

On June 27, talks were held between the EBYPs, the prime minister and the minister of health. Dr. Mo’amer Naji Al-Ammari, head of the protest’s Information Committee, said

that some progress had been made.

A renewed offer was not made within the last few days, so the Yemeni Physicians' and Pharmacists' Syndicate (YPPS) and the Yemeni Doctors' Syndicate (YDS) started a strike on July 2. Doctors and pharmacist in all governorates ceased work from then.

The dispute over the salary and status of doctors and pharmacists has been ongoing for some months. An initial agreement was reached between the two unions and the prime minister on March 6, after a YPPS strike crippled the health service.

The YPPS agreed to suspend the strike until July 2, when it would be resumed unless the government fulfilled its promise to increase doctors' wages to those set by the Ministry of Civil Service, the Ministry of Health and the syndicate. There has been no sign of the promised changes.

After discussion between the two unions an agreement was reached and a red-badge protest began in all governorates on June 24.

Dr. Abdullah Al-Hamidi, director of the Jumhuri Hospital in Sana'a and member of the executive council of the YPPS, appealed to all doctors to join in, save those working in the emergency services or performing life-saving surgery. "We demand wage equality with, at least, Indian or Russian nurses. They have salaries of US\$300-500 whereas a Yemeni doctor gets only US\$90 a month," he said.

The Yemeni Physicians' Syndicate is particularly concerned about the three extra years required to graduate as a physician. The syndicate is calling for recognition of this and recommends that each additional year should be counted as three, bringing the total to nine additional years, for the purposes of salary adjustment.

Al-Ammari also indicated that a minimum initial salary of YR 80,000 was being demanded for all graduate doctors.

Africa

Kenyan workers sent home after strike

Medical workers at two major hospitals in Kenya were suspended on June 30 for having taken part in a strike. One hundred sixty medical staff received notices of their suspension at Coast Provincial General Hospital in Mombasa and Msambweni District Hospital in the Kwale region. Another 33 workers were suspended at Isiolo District Hospital.

At the Coast hospital, two wards were closed after 80 workers were suspended. At Msambweni District Hospital, only one in four of the staff have been left at their posts. The management is now looking at closing down all but the emergency services, according to an article in the Nairobi-based newspaper, the *Nation*.

The strike was called by the Union of Kenya Civil Servants (UKCS) on June 2, in pursuance of a substantial pay increase. The minister of state in charge of public services had threatened that those who took part in the strike would be sacked—the Kenyan government is now seeking to stamp on all

forms of opposition to its cutbacks.

Auto component workers on strike in South Africa

Over 500 workers at the Schubbert and Kromberg motor component company at Brits, South Africa have been told they have been fired, while taking part in a month-long strike, according to a report by SABC news.

The strike is aimed at winning better working conditions and salary increases. The workers had previously refused to be intimidated by an ultimatum sent by the company.

The company produces parts used by Volkswagen and BMW.

Liberian civil servants start go-slow over salary arrears

On July 5, civil servants in Liberia started a go-slow to support their demand for the government to pay their salary arrears. An article in the *Liberian Observer* said that the protest had brought a number of government-owned companies to a halt. Another publication, the *Analyst*, stated that several government ministries were also closed.

The *Liberian Observer* reported that the civil servants were starving, and that they were owed their unpaid salaries for up to two years.

Doctors strike over fuel problems in Zimbabwe

A strike by Zimbabwean doctors began in the capital Harare on June 29, and then spread to the second biggest city of Bulawayo. The strike was over the doctors' problems in getting fuel for their vehicles.

The doctors wanted the government to provide fuel for their journeys, rather than having to wait in queues due to the national shortage of fuel. They were also demanding a pay rise of over 100 percent to counteract the effect of hyper-inflation.

The strike ended on July 1, after the government agreed to make allocations of fuel for the doctors. An article in *ZimOnline* stated that the government had acceded to the doctors' demands, but no information was given about any change in the doctors' pay.

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