

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature by e-mailing information to: editor@wsws.org

Europe

Strike call by French teachers

One of the two main French teaching unions issued a call April 13 for strike action. The dispute concerns the retention of Whit Monday as a public holiday, and the strike has been set for May 16.

Irish nurses protest

A series of protests by the Irish Nurses' Organisation began outside hospitals across the country April 12. The protests are part of a campaign by the INO to highlight the overcrowding problem in hospitals.

The protests began outside the Mater Hospital in Dublin, and at Cork University Hospital and Roscommon General Hospital. Further protests are expected to take place at Dublin's Tallaght Hospital, Cavan General and Mayo General Hospital.

Patients Together, the lobby group for patients' rights, has said that it fully supports the nurses' action.

UK college lecturers strike over pay dispute

Lecturers at Brooksby Melton College in Leicestershire walked out in a one-day strike over pay this week. Members of Natfhe, the university and college union, say they are angry at the failure of the college to award workers a 3 percent pay rise that was agreed nationally. The college says it cannot afford to pay the rise in full.

There have been strikes at other colleges in the East Midlands as lecturers strive for parity with schoolteachers.

The pay rise was agreed for the previous financial year, which ended in April.

BBC unions call for strike ballot over job cuts

Unions at the British Broadcasting Corporation are to ballot members for strike action over plans to cut up to 4,000 posts. The trade unions Bectu, Amicus and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) said the BBC had refused to meet their demand that there be no compulsory redundancies.

Luke Crawley of Bectu said the job losses represented the

"most damaging cuts" in the BBC's history. It is estimated that under the plans up to 20 percent of staff jobs would be sold, outsourced or made redundant.

The BBC first announced plans for substantial job cuts in December and expanded on them last month. Under the plans, more than 2,000 jobs are to go in programme-making departments, such as news, drama, factual and learning, and another 1,700 would be cut in support areas.

In addition, the BBC has refused to pledge that any staff affected by outsourcing of professional services such as finance, or the sale of BBC Broadcast and BBC Resources, would be guaranteed continued membership in a final salary pension scheme.

Members in the BBC's Global News division, including BBC World Service, are also due to be balloted. A review currently being conducted by management is expected to result in the announcement of redundancies by the summer.

Welsh bus drivers strike over pay

Bus drivers in Swansea took part in a four-hour strike that disrupted most city services on April 12. The drivers stopped work between 1000 and 1400 (BST) in a dispute with bus operator First Cymru over pay and conditions.

The Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) said the majority of its 250 members based at the Swansea depot took part in the action. The Swansea-to-Cardiff shuttle service was hit, but National Express coaches ran as normal.

Drivers in Swansea have been traditionally paid more than at other depots in south Wales, and have been offered a smaller percentage pay rise, than some lower-paid staff elsewhere.

Middle East

Israeli taxi drivers block roads over fuel prices

Taxi drivers staged a number of protests against a rise in fuel and insurance prices on April 11.

Several cab drivers tried to block off Tel Aviv's Ayalon Highway near Arlosoroff Street. Police broke up the protest and arrested 23 drivers. Elsewhere in the city, dozens of taxis formed a caravan that crawled along streets in the centre and north of the city, including Weizman and Arlosoroff. A police helicopter trailed the caravan. Cab

drivers in the center of the country have also declared a strike.

Drivers have warned that the rise in diesel fuel and insurance prices will force them to raise fares.

Israeli bank workers plan nationwide shut down

On April 11, Israeli bank workers declared they planned to hold a nationwide strike that would shut down all the country's banks and financial markets in a protest against the government's planned capital market reforms.

The strike is planned for next week, and unions have said 40,000 workers will launch an open-ended strike at Israel's 1,000 bank offices starting on Sunday April 17, with an expected heavy impact on the busy travel and shopping period just before the week-long Jewish holiday of Passover.

A strike would also paralyze the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange.

Bank employees are angry at proposed changes under Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's "free market reform programme" (dubbed the Bachar Committee reforms), including requirements for banks to sell their mutual funds and other asset management businesses. The changes are expected to lead to the layoff of 4,000 bank workers.

The strike is forecast to last only a few days, since banks and the government are expected to ask the state's labour court for an injunction ordering employees back to work.

Africa

South African coal miners continue mine occupation

Around 1,000 South African coal miners are locked in the mine where they work—the Kwaseheleza Shaft at the Zululand Anthracite Colliery (ZAC), near Ulundi, KwaZulu-Natal—as part of the fight to defend their jobs and livelihoods. The occupation began on April 7, after it became clear that ZAC was changing hands from Ingwe Colliers to Riversdale Mining, with no guarantees of the miners' jobs or benefits.

By April 12, at least 12 of the miners were suffering from exhaustion and dehydration, and 2 others had been taken to hospital by ambulance. In order to survive, the miners have been sharing the little food they have and drinking mine water that is unfit for human consumption.

The miners face court orders proclaiming their strike illegal. Those occupying the shaft had been ordered to leave by 5 p.m. on April 13. "They're on a knife edge," said the spokesperson for the Solidarity trade union, Reint Dykema. "If they don't leave, they face possible disciplinary action by the company or could even be fired," he told the Sapa news agency.

South African gold miners return to work after strike

Strikes by around 50,000 South African gold miners have been brought to an end by the miners' union, the National Union of Miners (NUM). Workers were striking to win a rise in their monthly living allowance from the current 706

rand to 1,200 rand (\$US190), as well to oppose threatened job cuts in the industry.

The strike by 30,000 miners employed by Gold Fields was ended by the NUM after the company won a court order declaring the strike illegal. "We will retreat," admitted the NUM spokesman, Moferefere Lekorotsoane. "We must comply with the court order."

The eight-day strike by 21,000 gold miners employed by Harmony in the Free State, South Africa, was ended on the night of April 6, when the national NUM leaders drew up an agreement with Harmony management.

According to the BBC, the agreement covers only working practices, and not the more contentious issue of job losses. The issues agreed upon were said to cover "replacement of deceased employees, short payment, racism, housing, healthcare", but did not address the threat hanging over all the jobs of the South African gold miners, as one company after another makes redundancies. Harmony Chief Executive Bernard Swanepoel has already revealed that the company intends to "restructure" the mines in the Free State.

Rail strike hits Ugandan exports

More than 1,200 Ugandan rail workers went out on strike March 30, to demand an increase in the pensions they will receive when they retire. They are demanding a pension of Shs27 billion (\$US15 million) for the current workforce, as well as other benefits.

As a result of the strike, many hundreds of tonnes of goods for export are building up in the Uganda Railways Corp. (URC) collection centres. The *New Vision* newspaper, based in Kampala, said that a fuel shortage was likely to start soon, due to the fact that the 780,000 litres of fuel normally carried into Uganda by the URC were no longer coming in.

The URC board chairman, Paul Etyang, has claimed that the strike is illegal because the union leaders did not call it.



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