

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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*The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.*

## UK: Industrial action by journalists

Members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) at the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, the *Yorkshire Post* and the *Leeds Weekly News* walked out February 26 in protest over plans by publisher, Johnston Press, to make up to 18 editorial redundancies, a number of which could be compulsory.

Johnston Press issued a statement urging the NUJ to accept the need for "organisational change." Chris Green, managing director of Yorkshire Post Newspapers, said, "In the current economic climate we could not possibly agree to the NUJ's demand for no compulsory redundancies."

The current action follows a recent four-day walkout, which the union claimed led to 140 of the papers' 160 editorial staff picketing Johnston Press's Wellington Street offices in Leeds.

*Yorkshire Post* Newspapers staffs were due to walk out again on March 4 and March 7, and have given notice of their intention to hold a series of daily mandatory chapel meetings between March 5 and March 10.

NUJ officials have pointed to the Press Association's efforts to assist Johnston Press during the industrial action. The union claimed PA had dedicated reporters working on stories for the *Yorkshire Post* and *Yorkshire Evening Post* and produced pages based on the papers' usual templates. Jenny Lennox, NUJ assistant organiser, said, "We were stunned by the sophistication of the Press Association strike-breaking operation."

The strike coincides with a number of other industrial actions across the country over job losses in journalism, including at the BBC South Asia service.

## Belgium: Postal workers strike against privatisation, jobs losses

An all-out three day national strike, involving tens of thousands of Belgian postal workers, began March 2 in protest at privatisation, jobs losses, a likely squeeze on pay and "liberalisation" of Europe's mail market in 2011.

The strike by more than 30,000 postal workers comes as Belgium's La Poste and other continental operators have been linked with buying the up-to-30 percent stake in Royal Mail to be auctioned by the UK government.

Danish Post, one of those interested in buying into Britain's Royal Mail, is selling its 24.9 percent stake in La Poste to private equity firm CVC Partners for €373 million, earning a profit of more than €200 million in three years. CVC, in turn, sold its 22 percent stake in Danish Post to the state-owned Swedish operator.

The Danish operator, which is merging with Sweden's Posten, paid about €150 million for its stake in a joint venture with CVC in 2006 that

took 50 percent, minus one share, in La Poste. The Belgian state owns 50 percent plus one share and must approve any change in the ownership structure.

Others in the frame are Germany's part-privatised Deutsche Post and TNT of the Netherlands, the frontrunner.

## France: Dockworkers strike over privatisation

Dockers at the port of Le Havre downed tools last week in protest at privatisation plans. The strike stopped work on freight containers, which is the port's main activity.

The CGT's ports and docks section said the strike was a one-off organised by the local branch. No other action is planned at present, a spokeswoman said.

The protest coincided with the first meeting of the new Development Council, part of a new organisational structure for the port. The port is to transfer 500 of 1,500 workers—mainly container crane drivers and maintenance mechanics—currently employed by the state to the private sector from 2011.

## Germany: Munich brewery strike

Workers at the world-renowned Hofbraeuhaus brewery in Munich walked off the job March 3 in support of state-wide demands for better wages reported *the Associated Press*.

Around 70 employees picketed in the morning outside the Hofbraeuhaus brewery, east of the city centre, in a short warning strike, according to the Union of Food, Consumption and Restaurant Workers.

Four other breweries were also hit by warning strikes, including the Augustiner, Spater-Franziskaner and Löwenbräu breweries in Munich. The union said more warning strikes were planned for later this week.

Workers are asking for a 6 percent raise as well as better training for new employees. Negotiators for the breweries have offered an increase of only 2 percent.

Up to 10,000 workers in Bavarian breweries are demanding the pay raise.

## Greece: Guards strike shut Acropolis for second day

Striking guards shut the Acropolis monuments to visitors for a second day, February 27, in protest at job cuts and delays in pay.

*Reuters* quoted Spyros Samartzis, general secretary of the federation of contractors to the Greek state, as saying: "Workers are in despair. It is

unacceptable that people who work for this important monument are not getting paid."

About 15 million people visit Greece and its monuments every year, with tourism greatly contributing to the economy. But due to the riots following the police shooting of a 15-year-old youth last year and the global financial crisis, fewer visitors are expected this year.

Samartzis said the guards would continue to strike if their demands were not met. Greece's private sector GSEE union, which represents about 2 million workers, in various sectors, has called a nationwide strike on April 2 to protest against job cuts and low wages.

### **Netherlands: Airport cleaners hold sit-down strike**

Over a hundred cleaners at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport held a sit-down strike to demand regular jobs, travel expenses and respect.

Prior to the action, the workers observed a minute's silence to commemorate the victims of the recent Turkish Airlines crash.

One cleaner, Ibrahim, said, "We clean up every day for 130,000 travellers and 60,000 co-workers at Schiphol. So it's not normal to have to work your first hours just to be able to travel to work, to have your breaks in dirty cellars without windows and to have no job security! That's why we're protesting."

According to *nieuwsuitamsterdam.nl*, the sit-down strike is a prelude to a larger action to take place on March 16 at Schiphol.

### **UK: Rail ticket office workers strike over holidays**

Over 130 ticket office staff at the c2c train operator took industrial action March 2.

The dispute is over the company's holiday policy, which includes not paying staff not working on bank holidays.

The workers protested outside London's Fenchurch Street station. They are demanding the company commits to 28 days' paid leave.

The RMT and TSSA rail unions called off a strike two weeks ago. TSSA General Secretary Gerry Doherty was quoted on the RMT web site, as saying, "It beggars belief that National Express is refusing bank holiday pay to our members after announcing profits of £194 million for last year."

The train operator c2c runs services between London and Essex.

### **Iran: Isfahan Steel workers stage hunger strike**

A March 3 article on the web site of the *National Council of Resistance of Iran*, reported that workers at the Isfahan Steel Mill Factory began a "symbolic hunger strike" on February 28, which will continue for two weeks.

The dispute concerns poor working conditions and discrimination. Workers are also objecting to a wide gap in pay between full-time and part-time employees in the factory, as well as lack of job security. Isfahan's Steel Mill Factory has over 10,000 part-time and 8,000 full-time workers. On December 2, 2008 around 1,000 workers of the factory had set up a blockade on the main Isfahan to Shahr-e Kurd highway in protests over pay. In the past months, angry workers in factories and workshops in

various cities across Iran have staged protests against the lack of job security, unpaid wages and monthly benefits and shortage of minimum necessities for themselves and their families.

### **Iran: Tire and rubber workers strike over pay**

Over 1,000 workers of Dena Tire and Rubber Company, in the southern city of Shiraz, have been on strike over pay since last week.

On March 2, the *National Council of Resistance of Iran* reported that striking workers gathered on company grounds demanding their unpaid wages and benefits for the past three months and money owed to them from last year.

Dena Tire and rubber MFG. Co was founded by a group of companies in 1974, under the name of Bridgestone Iran, with the investment and technological cooperation of Bridgestone Japan. It later terminated its relations with Bridgestone Japan and became a nationalized company under the name of Dena tire and rubber MFG. Co. In 1994, the government privatised it.

### **Kuwait: Port workers strike for higher pay**

Hundreds of Kuwaiti port workers stopped work at the Gulf state's three commercial ports March 2, demanding a pay raise and better working conditions.

"The response to the strike has been comprehensive and work was completely halted at the three ports," the head of the ports trade union, Ali al-Sukoni, told AFP.

Workers are demanding a 35 percent increase in their basic salary, a raise in incentives and better working conditions. Wages have not been increased since 1977. Union sources said that almost all the 930 workers joined the partial strike.

### **West Bank: Teachers strike at PA schools**

West Bank schools run by the Palestinian Authority closed March 2 and March 3 as teachers took strike action over the government's failure to meet union demands.

The strike is estimated to affect hundreds of schools and 39,000 teachers. The union has been demanding regular payment of salaries for teachers who work on yearly contracts, adjustment of salaries in accordance with higher cost of living and payment for teachers who worked extra hours monitoring and grading (high school exit and university placement) Tawjihi exams.

The strike follows a commercial strike across the West Bank February 28, in protest at the Israeli government's decision to demolish 90 homes in East Jerusalem and turn the area into a park.

### **Mozambican water workers strike to demand pay arrears**

Workers at the state-run water supply workshop (EPAR) in the western

Mozambique province of Tete have been on all-out indefinite strike since March 2. They are demanding the payment of eight months back wages and other benefits.

*Agencia de Informacao de Macambique* reported that over 2 million meticaïs (US\$76,000) were owed to the EPAR workers.

Augusto Catete, a spokesman for the strikers, told the agency that the strikers had not been paid since October 2008, when they received seven months wage arrears. Some of the amounts owed then went back as far as 2007.

Angry demonstrations have taken place outside the Provincial Directorate of Public Works and Housing. Catete warned, "If they do not pay us within 15 days we will sell all the equipment of the company to pay the eight months of wage arrears."

The National Water Board has promised to resolve the problem within 15 days.



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### **Nigerian teachers strike in 25 states**

Teachers in 25 of Nigeria's 36 states began an all-out, indefinite strike on February 28 to demand implementation of the Teachers Salary Structure (TSS). The TSS, which would give all teachers a pay increase of 27.5 percent, was agreed by state governors on August 6, 2008, after teachers had taken industrial action.

Last year's strike was suspended on the understanding that the agreement would be implemented by January 2009. By the end of February it was clear that most Nigerian states had reneged on the agreement. The National Executive Council of the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) endorsed the resumption of the suspended strike. Staffs in both primary and secondary schools are taking part in the action, with many schools placed under lock and key.

NUT Secretary-General Obong Ikpe Obong told *Vanguard*, "If governments fold their hands and watch, it is going to last long and it would be much more devastating this time than the last time in the sense that the NECO exams and the SSCE exam have not taken off yet, and they would be in serious jeopardy. We expect government to ensure that this doesn't happen."

Some state administrations have taken legal action in an attempt to force the teachers back to work. In Osun State, Justice Fasassi Ogunsola has granted an interim injunction restraining the union and the officials from carrying out the threat for strike. Union leaders in the state have had to go "underground" to avoid being arrested for contempt of court.

### **Ghanaian transit workers on strike over pay**

Workers employed by Metro Mass Transit Limited (MMT), within the Brong-Ahafo Regions in Ghana, went on strike in the early hours of March 2 to demand an increase in their pay.

Strikers angrily complained to the *Chronicle* about their low pay and insisted that they were not ready to work until something favourable came from management.

The Regional Traffic Manager of the MMT told the *Chronicle* that the union was flouting the directives of the Labour Act, which indicates that workers should not embark on an industrial strike when negotiations are ongoing.