

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

20 March 2009

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

## Rail strikes in UK

Rail workers employed at four different companies this week voted to take industrial action.

Staff at South West Trains, First Capital Connect, National Express East Anglia and the London Overground decided to take strike action over job losses and a "breakdown in industrial relations".

Meanwhile, London Midland had to cancel around 40 trains this week, on services between London and Northampton, because of the second 24-hour walkout in four days in a dispute over Sunday working conditions.

## UK: Strikes at BBC over threat of job losses

Thousands of journalists at the BBC are to hold two national one-day strikes April 3 and April 9 against compulsory redundancies. BBC staff members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) voted 77 percent in favour of strike action in a national ballot.

The largest threat of compulsory cuts is at the World Service's South Asian section, where up to 20 posts are under threat. London-based journalists on the BBC Hindi, Nepali and Urdu radio programmes and Web sites held a one-day strike last month over the cuts.

## UK: Strike at emergency services telecoms network

Staff at Airwave, the emergency services telecoms network company, took two days of strike action on March 13 and 16 in a dispute over compulsory redundancies.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) was in last-minute talks with Airwave, owned by private equity firm Macquarie, hoping to avert the strike.

The strike action involved 180 Airwave workers, including UK-wide field engineers and the main centre in Rugby.

## UK: Strike threat by lecturers over job cuts at college

Lecturers have declared the threat of strike action if Doncaster College, South Yorkshire, forces compulsory job losses as part of a reorganisation that includes the slashing of 160 posts, according to the March 12 *Doncaster Free Press*.

College management have said that 307 posts at The Hub and High Melton campuses are under threat in a bid to turn around its performance. The college currently employs around 1,100 people. Under the new proposals 19 managers, as well as 200 academic and 88 support posts are under threat. Unions say that some will have their positions downgraded and lecturers will be replaced with assessors. If this happens, the University and College Union (UCU) said those affected would leave the college, leading to yet more job losses. The initiative, entitled "Raising Standards", is the latest reorganisation the college has carried out in recent years that has been marked poorly in a government standards report. Last month staff also staged a walkout after a pay deal was not honoured.

## National one-day strike set in Ireland

A national one-day strike is set to paralyse Ireland on Monday, March 30. The strike has been called by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in protest at a proposed budget by the Fianna Fail and Greens government that intends to cut public spending by €4 billion and hike up taxes on the low paid.

Tens of thousands of workers are expected to join the strike and protests, with transport, airports and schools hit.

## Ireland: Aircraft maintenance workers protest over plant closure and job losses

Workers from the SR Technics aircraft maintenance plant at Dublin Airport held a demonstration in the city centre on March 13 in protest at the closure of the Dublin facility and the loss of over 1,200 jobs.

A delegation of workers from the aircraft maintenance firm later met with the European Commission representation in Dublin. They handed in a letter outlining their concerns about an inadequate redundancy package, as well as a deficit in the pension fund that some sources have estimated could exceed €20 million.

## **Belarus: Nationwide protests planned over union representation**

The independent Belarusian Radio and Electronic Industry (NPRP) trade union has said it is organising a series of protests to be held on April 3. NPRP leaders told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that the protests will be held in several major cities, adding that the goal of the actions is to persuade local authorities to register the NPRP's local branches. NRPR leader in the city of Magilev, Galina Lisitsina, said there had been eight attempts by the union's branch in the city to register in the last several years. NRPR Co-chairman Alyaksandr Bukhvostau said that the impediments faced by his organization show the "true state of liberalisation" recently trumpeted by Belarusian officials.

## **Finland: Internet broadband services workers walk out**

According to YLE News, 1,000 workers at TeliaSonera, Finland's broadband services, walked out March 17 protesting cutback plans.

The walkouts caused serious disruptions to services as it closed all TeliaSonera broadband offices and all broadband units of TeliaSonera across Finland.

Almost 3,000 employees of TeliaSonera Finland have decided to participate in support strikes. The workers oppose the results of the mandatory joint consultation that ended last week and "the rude personnel policy of the company". Some 318 jobs will be lost when TeliaSonera puts the cutback plans into practice. Around half of these are in Helsinki, 50 in Jyväskylä and 30 in Tampere.

## **Egypt: Scientists protest and threaten hunger strike**

Two hundred scientists belonging to research centres have staged a vigil in front of the National Research Centre, demanding payment of their bonuses on par with university professors. Professor at the National Research Centre, Dr Ali Eissa, told *Al-Masry Al-Youm* that the researchers will escalate their protests against the government. He said that the next step would be a sit-in inside the National Research Centre, and that hundreds of scientists would go on hunger strike.

Egypt has been gripped by a wave of working class militancy, across virtually every sector and especially in the textile industry. Hamdi Abdelazim, economist and former president of the Cairo-based Sadat Academy told the *Inter-Press Service*, "Recent strikes were called chiefly for economic reasons, not least of which has been the steadily increasing inflation seen in the last two years". Abdelhalim Kandil, editor-in-chief of *Sout Al-Umma*, wrote on March 9, "Every decision the Egyptian regime makes seems to meet with a workers' strike. The people's insistence on realising their demands is consistently forcing the government to overturn its decrees". According to Abdelazim, although local inflation rates have now fallen to somewhere between 14 and 18 percent, "for the bulk of Egypt's teeming population—some 40 percent of which currently lives on the poverty line—this is still much too high".

## **Iran: Drinks factory workers go on strike**

On March 2, the workers of the Nushab drinks factory went on strike. They were protesting against not being paid their New Year bonuses and wages for the past five months, according to the *Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network* and the *Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers*.

Nushab employs around 250 workers. The strikers said they would continue with their action until their demands have been met.

## **Nigerian health workers strike for better conditions**

Health workers in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, began indefinite strike action on March 17 to demand improved conditions of service. Before the strike the Joint Action Committee of the Medical Health Workers Union of Nigeria had given the state government a 21-day ultimatum and an additional 3 days to address their grievances, but the employers had failed to reply. The strike involves administrative staff, pharmacists, nurses, laboratory workers and midwives.

Obadiah Avre, chairman of the Action Committee told *Leadership* (Abuja) that medical workers were demanding improved conditions of service and an environment in which to operate, adding that among the 16 general hospitals in the state there were only 2 ambulances. He told the paper that "the much publicized free medical service for under-aged and the aged was a mirage—it didn't exist".

The union has accused the state government of refusing to increase funding for rehabilitation of the clinics and hospitals. Many health personnel have left the service because of the poor conditions of service.

## **Nigerian local government workers strike over dismissal of colleagues**

Local government workers in the Nigerian state of Benue have taken indefinite strike action to demand the reinstatement of around 530 members of staff sacked by the administration in the Vandeikya Local Government Area of Benue.

The National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) is also demanding the immediate payment of salaries to the affected staff, who have not received any payment since 2008.

Richard Gbande, state president of NULGE, told *Vanguard* that the action would continue until the leadership in Vandeikya LGC yielded to the demands of the union.

At a meeting of the union council held before the strike began, Chairman Marcel Akaasar pointed out that NULGE had called a strike late last year over similar issues. The union had later called off the action to allow negotiations to take place, but the issues had remained unresolved.



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