

# 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: rail union to ballot on strikes

The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) has announced that around 1000 rail engineering members at one of Network Rail's key contractors, Jarvis, would be taking industrial action on May 5 over the potential loss of 450 jobs.

The union has designated May 5 as a Day of Action, with a march on parliament to demand an end to cuts in rail jobs and services. The RMT also states that it will ballot engineering members for industrial action at five other key Network Rail contractors over the threat to jobs.

But at the eleventh hour, a planned 24-hour strike by nearly 700 RMT members due for May 1 was suspended. The strike on Stagecoach subsidiary East Midlands Trains was against plans to cut 200 jobs.

Separately, a fresh series of strikes has been announced by rail conductors in a long-running row over Sunday working. According to the BBC, the RMT said 100 of its members at London Midland will walk out every Sunday from May 3 to June 21.

The union said managers are being forced to cover for conductors on Sundays. London Midland runs trains between London Euston and Birmingham.

It is the sixth time that workers at Bletchley, Watford and Northampton have taken industrial action over the issue in less than two months.

## UK: SOAS staff to strike over "victimisation" of union activist

Support staff at the School of Oriental and African Studies—University of London (SOAS) are likely to strike after a trade union activist lost an appeal against his sacking.

The branch chair of Unison, the union for administrative staff at the college, has been suspended from his post. José Stalin Bermúdez is awaiting a hearing that could see him sacked from his employment with the college.

Bermúdez's colleagues and other campaigners say the move follows his role in leading a successful campaign at the university against poverty pay among cleaning staff.

According to [solomonsmindfield.net](http://solomonsmindfield.net), Bermúdez, an Ecuadorian immigrant and himself a former cleaner, "helped launch a campaign for the London Living Wage after Latin American SOAS cleaners approached him for support, as some of them had not been paid for three months by SOAS' cleaning contractor."

According to *London Student*, Bermúdez's "role in the justice for cleaner's campaign, seeking to raise cleaner's wages to the London

Living Wage standard, marked him as a target for school management."

Unison is balloting its members for strike action over the dismissal. Results are expected on May 5.

## UK: three-day journalists strike over job cuts

Staff at the *Daily Record* and *Sunday Mail* held a 3-day strike, from April 24, in protest at job cuts.

The current industrial action follows a 2-day walkout and 1 day strikes earlier this month.

Citing "unprecedented economic circumstances", the owners, Trinity Mirror, had said that 70 job losses were necessary to safeguard the future of the papers in "a rapidly changing media landscape".

According to BBC reports, a total of 36 journalists out of a staff of about 240 have already been accepted for voluntary redundancy. The company wants to see at least a further 18 journalists take compulsory redundancy at the 2 papers.

Representatives of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) at the Glasgow headquarters of the papers said only that they objected to the scale of the cuts, saying that they were "detrimental to journalism in Scotland".

The *Daily Record* and *Sunday Mail* made £20 million in profits last year and the Trinity Mirror group has transferred over £520 million to shareholders in the past 10 years.

Citing an anonymous member of staff, the BBC said "journalists across all titles and departments, including news, sport and production, appeared to be affected by the compulsory redundancies, including newer members of staff as well as experienced journalists who had been working on the newspapers for a number of years".

## Ireland: workers strike at Tesco

The *Irish Times*, April 29, reported that workers at one of the busiest Tesco stores in Douglas, County Cork had gone on strike over the retailing giant's plans not to honour established terms and conditions for staff moving to a new store in the area.

Mandate, the union representing the 80 workers at the Douglas branch of Tesco, which moved to new premises on May 1, claims the company is ignoring a long standing agreement with the union "guaranteeing workers transferring to new premises the right to hold onto their current terms and conditions."

The union also claimed that Tesco had threatened staff with a lockout without pay until June at meetings held ahead of the current strike.

Tesco Ireland—the largest retailer in the republic with 116 stores and 15 petrol stations, employing 13,500 workers—recently reported a 5.2 percent increase in sales revenues to €3.15 billion for the year to the end of

February.

### **Finland: postal strike**

According to yle.fi, a six-hour work stoppage by postal workers April 22 stopped mail sorting nationwide and disrupted mail delivery through to the end of the week.

The strike was in protest at post office job cuts affecting around 400 employees. Around 2,000 postal workers are involved in “layoff talks”.

The Finnish Post and Logistics Workers’ Union criticised the government for calling on private sector firms to keep staff on during the economic crisis while state-owned companies cut jobs.

### **Iran: teachers strike on non-implementation of Pay Parity Law**

Iranian teachers held a three-day strike between April 26-28 due to the fact that the Pay Parity Law passed in 2007 has still not been implemented, despite formal promises by the authorities.

Passed by the parliament in 2007, the Pay Parity Law guarantees better pay and working conditions for Iranian teachers. However, its implementation is still being delayed despite a promise made by President Ahmadinejad to have it implemented by 22 March this year.

According to the *Iranian Workers’ Solidarity Network* April 27, “teachers in Iran are currently facing problems in making ends meet, exacerbated by declining working conditions and delays in the payment of wages and pensions.

“In recent years, teachers have suffered harassment, repression and imprisonment for having taken to the streets. Even simple union gatherings have been repressed.”

Iranian authorities maintain a ban on the Iranian Teacher Trade Association (ITTA). Between September and December last year, according to the Iranian Workers’ Solidarity Network, meetings convened by the ITTA were repeatedly dispersed by the police and trade unionists, such as Mansour Osanloo, Farzad Kamangar and other teacher representatives, were held and interrogated.

The three-day strike began with teachers outlining to classes the reasons for their protest. On the second day teachers attended school but did not conduct lessons. On the third day, they boycotted schools altogether.

Areas of the country affected by the dispute include Tehran, Eslamshahr, Karaj, Pakdasht, Divandoreh, Koohdasht, Khomeini Shahr and Miandoab, as well as the provinces of Kermanshah, Yazd, Esfahan, Fars, Khorasan, Kordestan, Lorestan, Bushehr, Ardabil, East Azerbaijan, Hamadan and parts of Hormozgan.

### **South Africa: Johannesburg bus workers begin strike action**

On Tuesday April 28 drivers in Johannesburg working for the municipally-owned Metrobus company began strike action. Metrobus runs over 500 buses carrying 90,000 passengers each day.

The drivers, belonging to the SA Municipal Workers’ Union (SAMWU), had given notice of strike action April 9. Metrobus made a legal challenge to the strike, but on Friday April 24 the Labour Court ruled the action could go ahead. The drivers’ main demand is over pay

grades.

The union demand is that new drivers should earn between R7000-R8000 (US\$810-US\$930, £550-£630), that drivers with 5 to 7 years service be on the medium band monthly salary of R9000-R10,000(US\$1040-US\$1160, £710-£790) and those with more than 7 years service be on the maximum band of R11,000-R12,000 (US\$1280-US\$1390, £870-£950).

The union has said that if the demands are not met they will call for secondary strike action by workers in other Johannesburg municipal departments.

### **South African doctors continue action**

Doctors working in public hospitals have been taking industrial action, including strikes in support of pay demands and improved conditions at over 20 hospitals nationwide.

The action is mainly amongst junior doctors and interns. The South African Medical Association (SAMA) state the doctors are being underpaid by between 50 and 75 percent. Last July the government announced an “occupational specific dispensation” (OSD) increase but failed to implement it.

The dispute, which began mid-April, is being led by the Doctors’ Forum on OSD. This was set up by the doctors angry with SAMA’s failure to achieve their pay demands in negotiations with the government.

A report by the *South African Health News Service Health-e* quoted a Doctors’ Forum leader, working as an intern, who wished to remain anonymous. She explained that they were expected to work 200 hours per month overtime and be on call overnight 3 times a week. She explained, “It’s not just pay but also the working conditions. There is such a shortage of doctors so we have too many patients to see.”

The Labour Court meeting on Friday 24 ruled the doctors’ action unlawful, and SAMA has also opposed the doctors’ action. A report in the *Mail and Guardian* of April 28 stated that some doctors taking action had received letters of dismissal, and that the health department was issuing dismissal notices to over 330 doctors at the George Mukhari hospital near Pretoria (described as the largest hospital in the southern hemisphere).

### **Nigeria: strike of doctors at Ebonyi hospital enters fourth week**

Doctors at Ebonyi state teaching hospital are continuing their strike action demanding the implementation of the new government Consolidated Tertiary Institution Salary Structure. The Ebonyi state government has said it does not have the resources to pay the new salary structure and cites the global economic crisis for its lack of finance.

The state governor, Martin Elechi, has refused to take any responsibility to provide health care for the population, saying the doctors are free to seek “greener pastures.”

The doctors are also calling for the re-instatement of 14 doctors and 18 nurses dismissed by the management. Their action has been supported by other hospital workers.

The action of the doctors has brought the hospital, known as a leading medical facility in Nigeria, to a standstill. Journalists from *This Day* newspaper who visited the hospital reported seeing only two patients.



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