

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.

UK civil servants to stage 48-hour strike

Up to 270,000 civil servants are to stage a 48-hour strike March 8 and 9 in a dispute over cuts to public sector redundancy terms. The walkout is expected to involve staff at Jobcentre and tax offices, coastguards, border agency officials, courts staff and driving test examiners.

It is estimated that an employee with 20 years' service on an annual salary of £24,000 could lose £20,000 as a result of new caps on payoffs to those laid off and taking voluntary redundancy. The government says the changes will save £500 million.

Five other civil service unions have already reached agreement over the reforms.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union leaders say the cuts, planned for April, are illegal. Civil servants were balloted last month, with a 63 percent vote in favour of stoppages, and 81 percent backing an overtime ban.

Strike threat over cutbacks at the BBC

Staff at the BBC warned of industrial action after announcements that the broadcasting corporation is planning to close two national radio stations and vastly scale back its Web site.

According to the initial reports, BBC Asian Network and 6 Music are to be ended as part of the cost-cutting proposals. In addition, the BBC is to reduce the number of its Web pages by half and cut online staff by a quarter. The proposals would reportedly yield savings for the corporation of £600 million.

Some commentators have said the BBC's plans were an attempt to appease a possible Conservative government that would want to cut the BBC "down to size."

Welfare office staff in Ireland in dispute

Passport offices in Dublin and Cork closed on the afternoon of March 3 as a result of industrial action being staged by staff in protest at pay cuts

introduced in the government budget.

Bans on answering phones were also in place in the departments of Foreign Affairs, Social and Family Affairs, Environment, and Education and in the Office of Public Works.

The action is being undertaken by members of the Civil and Public Services Union (CPSU) and Public Service Executive Union (PSEU), which represent lower and mid-ranking civil servants.

Thousands of public servants have voted for an all-out strike. Members of the CPSU, which represents 13,000 lower-paid workers, were 83 percent in favour of escalating their protest when balloted.

The action has also spread to the health service. Nurses are to propose a campaign of rolling work stoppages—lasting two hours—in hospitals and other health service facilities. The Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) said that its executive council had voted to support "a significant escalation" of the current industrial action campaign. Calls to emergency departments will be answered, but those to critical services such as coronary care and maternity units will be screened on an hourly basis and only those identified as genuine emergencies will be returned.

The action is being taken by 30,000 health service employees and is set to spread.

Ireland: Third hunger striker at Green Isle Foods dispute

The SIPTU union Web site reported that John Recto, who joined the Green Isle Foods hunger strike March 3, had to call into Naas Garda Station that morning, where he was informed that his work visa has been revoked. He was told he has until March 8 to leave the country. He is from the Philippines and has been working at Green Isle Foods for the past three years.

His wife and three children, aged six, seven and one year old, are living with him in Naas. His youngest child was born in Ireland.

Between 10 and 13 maintenance workers have been on strike for the past six months in protest at the dismissals, which reportedly occurred when "a confidential file with restructuring proposals was mistakenly sent to an employee who shared the information with co-workers." The Labour Court has also ruled that the unfair dismissal of three members and the refusal of the company to recognise the men's right to union representation in the workplace should be reversed by a full reinstatement, or payment of €180,000 compensation for the loss of their jobs.

Neither of the men is amongst those originally dismissed, but unions accuse the firm of failing to abide with Labour Court recommendations to settle the dispute. As of writing, Technical Engineering and Electrical Union (TEEU) shop steward Jim Wyse, aged 58, has been on hunger strike for 15 days and John Guinan, aged 48, has been on hunger strike for eight days.

Green Isle—a subsidiary of Northern Foods Leeds, UK, which supplies

frozen products to giant supermarket chains such as Tesco and Dunnes—reportedly received generous state aid to set up its Irish factory.

Bank staff in Ireland ballot for industrial action over jobs

Staff at the Bank of Scotland (Ireland) (BoSI) overwhelmingly backed strike action in a ballot over last month's announcement that the bank will close its 44 Halifax branches in Ireland with the loss of 750 jobs. Unite members at BoSI not directly affected by the job losses voted by "a substantial majority" for their colleagues.

France hit by 24-hour port strike

A lightning 24-hour strike hit the country's ports February 26 as workers protested at what they said was the use of force by the government to enable MSC Cruises' newest cruise ship, MSC Magnifica, to escape from the strikebound port of Saint Nazaire.

The 24-hour strike was called immediately after the departure of the newly built vessel from Saint Nazaire on its inaugural cruise. The ports and docks federation of the CGT union confederation was protesting at the decision of the local prefect to requisition striking port workers to free the vessel from the Joubert graving dock.

Port workers at Nantes Saint-Nazaire went on strike February 24 to protest over the port authority's refusal to meet their claim for compensation for the loss of their public service status under the government's port reform. They claimed that the government had prevented the port authority from discussing their claim.

Dockworkers in Finland on strike

Dockworkers in Finland have gone on strike, following the breakdown of talks between the Transport Workers' Union (AKT) and the Finnish Port Operators Association.

The action is expected to hit 80 percent of exports and cost €30 million per day.

Israel: Workers strike at Israel Discount Bank

On March 1 and 2, employees of the Israel Discount Bank protested nationwide to demand an end to outsourcing and for an increase in pay by an average of 5 percent per employee. The bank is only offering 2.5 percent.

On Monday those employed in computer services did not repair breakdowns or provide software support due to a stoppage by computer control and technical staff. The following day 32 bank branches of the bank in the Sharon district were closed.

Egyptian cleaning workers in Kuwait protest to demand wages payment

Up to 300 Egyptian workers employed at the Al-Abraj Company, a cleaning and contracting company in Kuwait City, protested March 2 to demand payment of their wages. According to an *Arab Times* report, the staff are employed in the Ministries complex.

One of the workers involved, Al-Tantawi Hassan, told the *Arab Times* that employees had also been threatened with the loss of their jobs and even deportation for protesting. According to the employee, staff can no longer afford daily meals and have to borrow money from friends.

Following a campaign that has included protests and legal action, the workers have appealed to the Social Affairs and Labour Ministry's Undersecretary Mansour Al-Mansour.

Protests outside parliament building in Cairo, Egypt

On Monday a number of demonstrations were held outside the parliament building in Cairo, Egypt. Those protesting included 100 Amonsito textiles company employees calling for overdue wages and bonuses to be paid, 60 disabled people demanding social rights, and 10 families from the city of Alexandria opposing plans that would result in the demolition of their homes. Also demonstrating were employees of the Real Estate Tax Authority who were demanding the authority pay out promised bonuses.

According to the Amonsito textile employees, the owner of the firm fled abroad without paying back bank loans. The firm had been sequestered due to its unpaid debts. Other workers from the Nubaria Engineering and Agricultural Automation Company also protested outside the parliament and held a "sleep-in" there on Monday evening.

The disabled workers were demonstrating for a third consecutive day to demand a fair allocation of public housing and jobs.

Theme park workers strike in Egypt

On February 18 more than 200 employees of the Magic Land theme park walked off the job in pursuit of unpaid salaries and bonuses. The firm was recently sold to an Indian investor, who has been accused by staff of failing to pay them their proper salaries and bonuses. According to one worker who spoke to the media, the new management had also removed their two-day weekend and forced them to work a six-day week.

Workers barricade Miluz Ltdin factory in Israel

On February 18, Israeli workers employed at Miluz Ltdin, the manufacturers of the "Tal" brand tomato paste, in Nahariya, began a barricade of the plant. The staff took the action in protest at the sacking of 37 of the factory's 100 full-time employees. Workers fear that the layoffs are in preparation for the closure and sale of the plant. Employees claim that the plant's warehouses have been emptied recently.

The factory was established in 1965 and employs 100 permanent

unionised employees, and 400 seasonal non-unionised staff.

Swaziland accountants on strike

Over 600 government accountants began strike action March 1, protesting the government's failure to implement a salary review from 2005. A representative of the Swaziland National Association of Government Accounting Personnel, Themba Nhlabatsi, said, "We want our money. We have worked for it and we no longer understand these delays because other civil servants were long paid."

Teachers in Ghana strike over promised allowances

Teachers belonging to the National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT) began nationwide strike action March 1. They are striking over the government's failure to pay allowances. The Ghana Education Services had signed an agreement with NAGRAT to pay car maintenance and responsibility allowances by January 31 this year, but the deadline was missed.

Oil workers protest in Nigeria met with violence

A report in the Nigerian *Daily Champion* says that on February 23 a peaceful protest of 200 workers employed at the Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (DESOPADEC) was met with brutality by the notorious paramilitary mobile police unit.

The workers were protesting over unpaid salaries and furniture allowances. It was reported that the police opened fire, and a source claimed one of the protesters was killed, but the authorities deny this.

Nigerian council workers strike action

Local government workers in the 17 council areas throughout Abia state began all-out strike action at the start of the month. The council workers belong to the Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees. They are taking action over unpaid arrears of salaries and allowances.



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