

# 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.*

## **Ireland: Rehab workers prepare to strike**

Up to 900 staff at the social inclusion organisation Rehab are preparing to go on strike over the imposition of pay cuts without consultation, according to a report in the *Irish Examiner*, April 13

The workers are to be subjected to pay cuts in line with those imposed on the public service in the December budget. They argue that the government has already determined that staff at agencies such as Rehab are not public servants and so the budget cuts should not affect them.

According to the union SIPTU, Rehab management said on February 9 it intended to implement the public sector pay cut with effect from January and to impose 24 redundancies across the Rehab Group. It said failure to achieve such an outcome would result in 115 redundancies.

In response, the union requested other measures for achieving the necessary savings be examined, including voluntary redundancies. It suggested a number of temporary pay adjustments, such as the non-payment of one hour's work over a specific time frame or a provisional payment levy.

The company rejected the proposals and announced it was implementing the pay cuts from February 2010 with a 12-month review.

Talks between management and SIPTU broke down April 1. A subsequent ballot saw a majority in favour of strike action. No date has been set.

On April 12, the Rehab Group confirmed that since January it has received funding reductions averaging 7 percent and in some areas as high as 14 percent "in public sector funding" for delivery of its services to people with disabilities.

## **Finland: Strike by retail workers**

The Service Union United (PAM) has rejected a proposal by the national labour mediator aimed at averting a pay strike of retail workers set for April 16.

National Conciliator Esa Lonka presented negotiators with the compromise plan April 12, reported *YLE*. The union said the pay rise was insufficient. PAM says it will stage a one-day walkout. Lonka says no more talks regarding the retail branch are likely before the strike day.

Lonka's proposal came soon after talks resumed ahead of a threatened strike by retail shop employees and security guards. Last week, PAM called for an overtime ban in the commercial and security sectors.

## **UK: Scottish rail workers on three-day strike**

Hundreds of Scottish rail workers, employed by First ScotRail, took part in a three-day walkout, beginning April 12, over plans to employ ticket examiners rather than conductors on the new Airdrie-to-Bathgate line.

The Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) has said that conductors, or guards, are best equipped to deal with serious incidents and that the plan will "jeopardise passenger safety."

## **UK: Telecommunication workers set to call pay strike**

Workers at formerly state-owned British Telecom (BT) are threatening industrial action, following attempts by management to impose a pay cut for the second year running.

A ballot of 50,000 workers for strike action will take place unless the company backs down. According to the *Daily Mirror*, in a letter to members leaked to *Your Money*, Andy Kerr, deputy general secretary of the Communication Workers Union (CWU), says BT's position is "not acceptable" and negotiations had reached a "critical stage."

The paper says, "The letter reveals the union is demanding a 5 percent increase in pensionable pay. After seven meetings with management, Kerr says BT has offered a 2 percent increase which, with inflation at more than 3 percent, the union says is a cut in real terms. Worse still, the rise would not count towards workers' pensions."

With the help of the union, BT has managed to cut 30,000 jobs in the past two years. Meanwhile, third-quarter profits rose 11 percent to

£1.4 billion.

### **Egypt: Strike round-up**

Around 300 workers at the Samo factory for ready-made garments in Port Said, who had not received wages for two months, took strike action April 7. The workers also say that management often makes deductions from their income and threatens them with layoffs.

Workers at the Dobera Spinning and Weaving Company in Ismailia went on strike last week, saying the company's production manager assaulted a colleague. They also requested that the minister of manpower penalise the company for illegally recruiting foreign workers, reported *Al Masry Al Youm*.

Among further industrial struggles reported by *Al Masry Al Youm* in the past week are:

In Sharqiya, 100 villagers staged a demonstration before the provincial headquarters to protest the housing ministry's confiscation of their homes, which are scheduled for demolition to make way for a water pipeline. The villagers have been ordered to evacuate their homes within two weeks.

In Menoufiya, 250 workers of the Minotex factory for blankets continued their sit-in for a second day to protest the company management's offer to sell the factory at a public auction.

In Gharbiya, nurses working at the public chest hospital ended their sit-in after the administration agreed to pay them 75 percent of the bonuses they had demanded.

### **Nigeria: Oil workers strike**

Oil workers belonging to the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) in the Warri zone began indefinite strike action last weekend. The Warri zone comprises the states of Edo, Delta, Ondo, Ekiti and Kogi. The action is being taken against Pat Onosen enterprises Nigeria Limited and Chevron Nigeria. Pat Onosen is a contractor to Chevron.

The strike decision followed an emergency meeting of the NUPENG Warri zone on April 7. The workers are taking the action following Onosen and Chevron's refusal to honour the terms of a collective bargaining agreement signed between the oil companies and the union back in 2007.

#### **South Africa: Municipal workers take action**

Around 130,000 municipal workers began nationwide strike action Monday, April 12. The workers are responsible for street cleaning, rubbish collection and vehicle licensing amongst other jobs. They are members of the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU).

The employers' association, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), went to court at the weekend to try to get the strike stopped. However, the court dismissed SALGA's claim. SALGA was due to go to court again Tuesday, April 13, but in the end decided to withdraw its application.

The workers want a uniform job-grading system to be introduced and wage rates that more fairly reflect current market rates. SAMWU spokesman Tahir Sema explained, "We have fought for seven years to

attain uniformity in municipal workers' salaries." The union and employers were due to meet Wednesday, April 14, for further talks.

A Reuters report of April 13 said the union was planning to intensify the strikes and target new areas, and that a second major march will be held in Johannesburg on Thursday, April 15.

### **South Africa: Metrorail workers threatened with sack**

Cape Town Metrorail workers who were due to return to work Monday, April 12, have been threatened with dismissal by the company. The workers took action in a dispute over Christmas bonuses. Riana Scott, Metrorail spokeswoman, said around 400 such dismissal letters would be sent out.

The workers are organised in the South Africa Transport and Allied Workers Union. The union provincial secretary, Evan Abrahamse, described the employer's proposed action as illegal. He said it went against an agreement reached between the union and employer that took place Friday, April 9, which was held under the auspices of the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration.

### **Gabon: Oil workers set to strike**

Around 5,000 oil workers belonging to the National Organisation of Petroleum Employees (ONEP) were set to begin strike action. ONEP spokesman Arnauld Engandji, speaking at a press conference on April 13, warned people to stock up on petrol prior to launching their strike which he said "could be long" with "disagreeable consequences." He declined to give an exact start date for the strike.

The union had called off a previous strike due to take place in March, after agreeing to hold talks with the government. The government had wanted to class the oil industry as part of services that must not be subject to disruption, thus restricting the oil workers' rights to take action in support of grievances.

Those talks have now broken down and the strike is back on the agenda. Gabon is Africa's seventh largest producer, at around a quarter of a million barrels a day. Total of France and Canadian Natural Resources are two of the major foreign investors in Gabon's oil industry.



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