

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.

Italian public sector workers strike nationwide

A strike of public sector employees March 12 against attacks on workers' employment conditions affected the whole country. The strike included workers in transit, airports, utilities, universities, local and provincial governments, social services, tax offices, clinics, ferries and even Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's office, ANSA reported.

Workers marched through the capital, Rome, to defend national contracts against the moves towards separate negotiations, set in the private sector when Fiat imposed plant-by-plant deals on autoworkers.

The USB union told the Italian news agency ANSA, "Many cities are gridlocked."

A number of unions in Rome attempted to avert a strike in the capital's public transportation system, but many of their members defied the union tops and walked out. Both of Rome's subway lines closed and trains were severely disrupted.

One striker told ANSA, "I can't understand my union. We don't know, for example, what agreement they signed yesterday because no one informed us."

Another worker said, "We are here because the agreements that our unions sign are unclear. We workers are in the dark about everything."

Public transport workers strike in Athens

Public transport workers in Athens staged a 24-hour strike on Thursday. The employees are protesting plans a reduction in funding and the eventual privatization of the network. Workers struck to oppose the transfer of employees to other departments.

The only public transport available in the city was on buses, as tram, trolley buses, metro and ISAP electric railway staff struck.

Public transport workers have struck more than 10 times since December.

Scottish university lecturers strike against attacks on pension rights

Lecturers in a number of Scottish universities, University of Warwick in Coventry, and the Open Universities took strike action Thursday to protest attacks on their pension rights. The employees, members of the University and College Union (UCU), walked out at Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Heriot-Watt, Strathclyde, and St. Andrews universities. Some 135,000 students at the Scottish universities are affected by the walkout.

The universities are seeking to reduce pension benefits. Among their proposals is the removal of final salary pension schemes. This would result in workers having to pay more and then receive a smaller pension once retired.

The UCU only reluctantly allowed the strikes to proceed, stating on Wednesday it had gone ahead "despite last-minute efforts from UCU to get university employers' representatives back round the negotiating table." The union said it "even launched an eleventh hour effort on the social media web site Twitter to break the impasse today."

Further strikes are being held on Friday at universities in Wales. Lecturers at universities in Northern Ireland will strike next Monday and in England on Tuesday. A UK-wide strike is scheduled for March 24.

Welsh teachers begin strike over jobs

Teachers at a school in Powys, Wales, are to stage six one-day strikes, beginning this week, due to concerns over compulsory redundancies. The first strike was held on Thursday. The NASUWT union claimed six jobs were under threat at Brecon High School, which has 800 pupils and 45 teachers.

The NASUWT said the school's governors had overseen financial mismanagement, turning a £100,000 surplus into a projected £650,000 deficit in three years. Head teacher Ingrid Gallagher said "positive action" had been taken to tackle an "anticipated budget deficit caused by reduced funding and falling school numbers."

Further industrial action is scheduled for March 30 and 31 and April 5, 6 and 7.

Powys council is proposing a shake-up of secondary education, which could lead to a merger of schools and some sixth forms being closed.

Postal works on Isle of Man in pay strike

Manx postal workers have voted in favour of industrial action in a pay dispute. The workers are seeking a pay rise.

A pay freeze has been imposed across the public sector. Chairman of Isle of Man Post Office, Alan Crowe, said the action by workers would not change the freeze on public sector pay.

Jon Joughin, from the Isle of Man Communication Workers Union, has asked the Post Office for renewed talks in order to avoid further strikes.

Newry Democrat journalists strike over job losses in Northern Ireland

Journalists at the *Newry Democrat* will stage a one-day strike on March 21, in response to forced redundancies at the newspaper, which covers Newry, County Down in Northern Ireland.

The National Union of Journalists served a strike notice on the paper after owners, Alpha Newspaper Group, refused to engage in negotiations over staff cuts.

Four production staff were made redundant a few months after Alpha closed three publications in the Republic. Alpha is owned by Lord Kilclooney, former deputy leader of the Ulster Unionist Party.

Workers at MFG Teo in Ireland strike over pay cuts

A notice to strike was served March 10 on Meitheal Forbartha na Gaeltacta Teo (MFG Teo) in County Galway to commence from March 16, over the imposition of pay cuts and the issue of redundancy notices sent to four workers. MFG Teo carries out community development programmes in the Gaeltacht areas of Ireland.

Serbian teachers to escalate protest if wages cut

Teachers, who have been cutting school classes 15 minutes short since January, have announced that they will not hold classes at all as of March 25 if their wages are cut.

Independence Trade Union President Tomislav Ivanovi? told B92 that Education Minister Marko Obradovi? had been invited to talks.

The Education Ministry said earlier that those teachers who continued the strike after February 7 would be paid based on their performance.

Bahraini workers strike and protest state repression

According to the national.ae web site, workers at Bahrain's two largest companies, Aluminium Bahrain (Alba) and Bahrain Petroleum Company (Bapco), began strike action on Sunday. The action came amidst the growing wave of protests against the King Hamad bin Issa al-Khalifa monarchy.

Sayed Salman, the president of the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU), representing 25,000 employees from 70 unions, said, "About 90 percent of Bahraini workers in the trade union or outside responded to the call of the general federation to go on strike"

He added, "We called every single trade union and [the vast majority] of the trade unions said they had already responded to an order to strike"

The strike was called as thousands of protesters blockaded a main thoroughfare to Bahrain Financial Harbour on Sunday. A number of demonstrators were injured after being attacked by massed riot police firing tear gas and water cannon.

According to the national.ae, "The union federation's primary demand is for 'better dialogue' between the crown prince of Bahrain and the protesters".

The report added that the "union federation is associated with seven political societies involved in the national dialogue initiated by His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander."

Despite GFBTU Secretary-General Salman Mahfoodh insisting that the strike is open-ended, Ali al Bin Ali, the leader of Alba's trade union, said production at the aluminium plant was not threatened by the strike. The 300 striking workers were from "non-essential" departments, he said.

Bahraini workers protest over unpaid wages

Over 300 workers protested March 10, at a contracting company in Khamis, Bahrain over unpaid wages. This is the fourth such incident since November. The Indian workers at Ali Bin Ebrahim Abdul A'al Holding Company said that they have not received their wages since December and have been told that there is no work for them to do.

One worker, who wished not to be named, said, "We have been living on donations from friends and acquaintances for the last few months, with no work and no money.

"We have even asked for our dues so we can go back to India, but these have also not been paid. We are only sitting in our labour accommodation and whiling away our time. We have asked to be released so we could look for work elsewhere, but even that has not happened."

The worker said that only in the last three days had the company organised two meal packets a day for the workers at their Sanad, Ma'ameer and Khamis labour accommodation. Power supply to the Sanad accommodation had also been cut for several weeks and there was a generator in place.

The worker said payments had been irregular for more than a year. "While we are worried about salaries, we are more worried about our settlements that run into several hundred dinars for each of us," he said.

Egyptian media workers call for resignation of Mubarak regime loyalists

Hundreds of staff employed by the Egyptian Radio and Television Union staged their third consecutive day of protests March 16, inside the TV Building, demanding the resignation of members of the administration they say are loyal to the regime of ousted president Hosni Mubarak.

The employees are demanding the dismissal of Sami al-Sherif, head of the union, because he was a member of the former ruling National Democratic Party, and Abdel Latif al-Menawy, head of the news department, for having distorted the image of the January 25 Revolution.

Television director and filmmaker Ayman Abdel Rahman said Major General Ismail Othman, public relations director of the armed forces, visited the protesters on Monday and listened to their demands. He told them that al-Sherif would stay in office.

The protesters also demanded the formation of a "Board of Trustees" that represents the views of all national political forces.

Strike by Kenya Power and Lighting Company workers

A strike by Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC) workers began last week when workers at the Mombasa depot went on strike after management accused them of frequently claiming field trip expenses and tried to reclaim the money. Around 360 of the workers were threatened with disciplinary action if they did not return to work.

The strike spread Monday of this week, when the Kenya Electrical Trades and Allied Workers Union (KETAWU) working for KPLC came out in sympathy.

Around 10,000 workers joined the action. As well as supporting the Mombasa workers they put forward their own demands. These included that agreed pay increases due to be implemented in January should be honoured and an end to the practice of employing workers on casual contracts without reviewing them for long periods. According to the union, some workers had been on casual contracts for more than 10 years. Workers on casual contracts should have them reviewed after 28 days or made permanent.

Two KETAWU officials were arrested by the police when workers picketed the KPLC office in the western Kenya port city of Kisumu. The arrests occurred when police tried to break up the legal picket.

The strike was called off later in the day, when the union met with KPLC management at a meeting chaired by Ministry of Labour officials in Nairobi. Conciliation meetings between the union and KPLC management were due to be held the following day at the Ministry of Labour HQ.

Ghana teachers strike

Teachers under the auspices of the Coalition of Concerned Teachers (CCT) began strike action last week over the introduction of a new Single Spine Salary Structure. While this led to some teachers getting a small rise, other had their pay cut.

Government representatives met with the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) and the National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT) and offered a 15 percent pay rise as a retention premium.

However, teachers rejected this and put forward demands that the government review teachers' salaries with a view to offering a substantial increase in salary and payment of allowances to cover rent, transport and other basic expenses. The demands were announced in a press conference held in the city of Kumasi on Monday.

At the press conference the teachers also announced they had no confidence in the GNAT and NAGRAT leadership, calling on them to resign and for the assets of the unions to be handed over to the Trades Union Congress while the union constitutions were reviewed and a new leadership appointed.

Strike by nurses in Swaziland

Nurses in Swaziland took strike action last week. Among their demands were for a salary increase, for wages to be paid on time and the payment of overtime pay, dating back to 2007. The strike resulted in the closure of public hospitals and clinics.

On Monday and Tuesday last week the nurses picketed the health ministry in the capital Mbabane. On March 9 the government won a court order for the nurses to return to work. However, the 400 nurses disregarded the order and continued their strike. At some facilities, the demonstrating nurses were joined by doctors in support of their demands.



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