

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

3 February 2012

Tax office strike over privatisation across the UK

Several hundred workers went on a 24-hour strike over privatisation at a tax office in Belfast, “with more protesting across the region”, according to the Press Association.

Picket lines were set up across the UK in protest at the appointment of two private companies, Sitel and Teleperformance, to run call-handling trials in HMRC tax credit contact centres in Lillyhall in Cumbria and Bathgate in Scotland.

The yearlong trials are due to start next month and there is concern amongst the workforce that this will pave the way for privatisation. This coincides with the cutting of tens of thousands of civil service jobs across the UK.

UK journalists at Newsquest work-to-rule over pay freeze

By a vote of 95.2 percent, journalists at Newsquest offices in Essex resolved this week to take industrial action short of a strike, resulting in a work-to-rule against the imposition of a further real-term pay cut.

“During the action, journalists will be working to their contracts, taking the screen breaks and meal breaks they are entitled to and refusing to take on additional work over and above their normal contracted duties,” explained the web site of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ).

The work-to-rule is for two weeks and will be followed by a three-day strike.

NUJ members were due a pay review last month, but the company shifted the date to June without a guarantee of a raise. This will be the third year in four in which thousands of staff have been forced to take a pay freeze.

Iberia pilots strike for five more days over low-cost carrier

On Tuesday, pilots employed by the Iberia airline announced another five days of industrial against the creation of a low-cost carrier. The pilots at the carrier have staged seven strike days over the issue in just over a month.

The pilots are supporting protests called by land workers and cabin crew for February 13, 17, 20, 24 and 29. Pilots say the decision to transfer 40 Iberia aircraft to the new carrier jeopardizes around 5,000 jobs.

Strike against privatisation at Turkish Cyprus Electricity Facility

The workforce at the Turkish Cyprus Electricity Facility (TCEF) went on strike January 19, against the government’s privatization plans. The Turkish Cypriot Cabinet prohibited the strike for 60 days.

The Union Platform, which consists of 36 organizations, including political parties and nongovernmental organizations have pledged to stage a “grand action” on January 30, according to the Cypriot *Daily News*.

Workers carried out industrial action around the Teknecik power plant, but electricity production began again after technicians from AKSA Energy entered the power plant under police protection.

Vita Cortex workers in Ireland protest outside home of owner

Sixteen Vita Cortex workers protested outside the 300-acre stud farm and home of company owner, Jack Ronan, in Co. Tipperary, in a long-running dispute over redundancy payments.

A January 30 press release on the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) web site said, “Following the morning protest outside Ronan’s home the Vita Cortex workers travelled to the house of company co-owner Sean McHenry in Douglas, Cork, where they mounted another peaceful demonstration.”

Egyptian workers hold Luxor governor hostage for better wages

Hundreds of Luxor Cleaning Authority workers held Luxor’s governor hostage in his office to demand better wages. The workers reportedly stopped traffic and sealed the governorate headquarters with chains January 31.

This was the second time in a week that the workers had been protesting for better wages and permanent contracts.

Egyptian media workers begin sit-in at state TV building

Media workers began a sit-in in front of the state TV building on January 25 in a protest against government interference.

Ziad Ali, anchor at state owned Radio Masr, whose show was temporarily suspended for criticizing the military council, told *Daily News Egypt*, “A few days ago I talked about a protest inside Nile News Channel

against Minister of Information Ahmed Anis, who refused airing of a documentary about Mubarak's rule. The surprise is that no one stopped me and I was never notified to tone down my criticism."

On January 22, reporters and producers on Nile News Channel protested against the banning of the documentary *My Name is Tahrir Square*, which was critical of the Mubarak regime and police brutality.

Journalists protested in front of Anis' office, threatening not to broadcast the news. The documentary was eventually aired after growing pressure.

Staff strike at Israeli prime minister's office

Histradrut reports that the 1,000 employees of the prime minister's office have decided to take industrial action to protest the finance ministry's decision to break a collective agreement and not pay them a bonus.

Workers will not be answering phones, sending mail, or paying bills. They demonstrated outside the room where the cabinet meets on Sundays.

Doctors at government-run hospitals in Oman suspend strike

Doctors at the government-run hospitals in Oman have suspended their industrial action following a meeting with governmental authorities.

The doctors went on an hour-long strike on Saturday and planned to increase the strike hours each day to demand reforms in the health sector. They have decided to suspend their strike until June.

Nigerian lecturers end strike

The nationwide strike by lecturers in the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has ended after two months. The lecturers' demands had been for increased funding for universities, a salary increase and for a set retirement age. They were due to return to work Thursday.

Union representatives met with the federal government on Monday and forged a settlement, but details have not been made public.

Nigerian oil workers return to work after two days on strike

A strike by oil delivery workers belonging to the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG), which began on Tuesday, was wound up after two days. The workers involved are responsible for fuel deliveries.

The dispute centred on the refusal of Shell to recognise a union committee set up after a union official was expelled. Legal action is currently being pursued in a dispute between the national union and its Shell branch.

Oil unions refused to call out their members in the recent general strike and protests against Nigerian President Jonathan's scrapping of a fuel subsidy, which has led to the price of fuel more than doubling. Action by the oil workers would have had a major impact on the government, which

gets the majority of its income from oil exports.

Zambian copper miners' strike

Around 3,000 copper miners in the National Union of Miners and Allied Workers held a 12-hour sit-down strike on Saturday at the Mopani mine. The mine is part of the Swiss-based Glencore International. It is Zambia's third largest producer of copper and cobalt.

The miners are seeking a 20 percent pay increase as opposed to the company offer of 12 percent. The miners returned to work after the sit-down strike and negotiations are continuing.

Tanzanian doctors strike

A strike by intern doctors in public hospitals began on Monday. Among the doctors' demands were a pay increase, health insurance and improved working conditions.

Doctors' representatives were due to meet with the prime minister on Sunday, but the meeting did not go ahead.

The strike has been declared illegal. Under Tanzanian law, groups of workers such as firemen and doctors are prohibited from taking strike action. The Trade Union Congress of Tanzania denounced the doctors' action.

Zimbabwe: Strike by non-university tertiary lecturers

Lectures in 28 tertiary institutions, including polytechnics, teacher training colleges and vocational training centres, went on strike this week as part of the ongoing public sector workers' action in pursuit of a living wage of \$540 a month. Currently some of the striking lecturers are on salaries as low as \$200 a month.

Talks last week between an umbrella body representing public sector workers and the government broke down after the offer of a \$7 a month increase.

Kenyan doctors give notice of strike

At the weekend, doctors gave a one-week notice of strike. The doctors, represented by the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union, accuse the government of renegeing on an agreement reached in December last year that ended a one-week strike.

South Africa: Strike of platinum miners grows

Last week around 5,000 rock drill operators at the Impala Platinum (Implats) mine at Rustenburg went on strike, protesting not being included in a scheme to pay miners a retention bonus in an attempt to reduce staff

turnover.

On Monday around 25,000 miners stayed away from the mine in sympathy with the rock drillers.

The company has obtained a court order deeming the strike illegal. An Implats spokesman stated, “The failure of the work force to report for work was due to an alternative union ... the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union ... attempting to gain recognition at the Rustenburg operation.”

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) had previously been the sole representative of mineworkers at the site.

Implats has begun dismissing workers who have not reported for work, saying it will rehire those who re-apply for their jobs on new terms yet to be finalised.



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