

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

4 May 2012

## Germany: Metalworkers in pay strike

Over 30,000 workers from the IG Metall union joined a strike on Wednesday to call for a 6.5 percent pay rise. The strike hit parts supplier Bosch, Mercedes and Volkswagen across the country and heavy trucks manufacturer MAN.

## UK: Train drivers strike over pensions

On Tuesday, hundreds of drivers from East Midlands Trains (EMT) walked out on the first of six strikes planned in May.

The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen states that EMT, “is proposing to reduce its contributions into the scheme despite the turbulent economic climate which is likely to have reduced the fund’s assets since the last valuation. The Company’s short term cost cutting measures will have long term implications for all EMT staff and their pensions.” The reduction in pension contributions for workers is expected to be enacted from July.

## UK: Further education staff ballot over pay cuts

The University and College Union (UCU) announced Monday that its members at Sunderland College will be balloted for industrial action in a pay dispute.

The college intends to cut the salaries of more than 150 lecturers by £10,000 and downgrade 70 percent of its teaching workforce to inferior pay grades. The ballot is to close May 18.

According to the Annual Survey of Hourly Earnings (ASHE) from the Office for National Statistics the full-time mean average annual pay (2011) for a further education teaching professional was £35,216, and for all full-time professionals £32,837. Sunderland College intends to reduce annual full-time salaries to £24,786.

## Library staff in London strikes over privatisation

Around 100 workers at 13 libraries in Greenwich, London began five days of industrial action April 27, over the council’s proposal to privatise library services.

The council intends to transfer all its library services to Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), where staff are on inferior pay and conditions and do not receive the London Living Wage of £8.30 an hour.

## Domestic workers in Ireland launch “week of action”

The Domestic Workers Action Group (DWAG) launched a week of action from May Day to May 7.

The DWAG is calling on the government to establish more robust laws and regulations to “prevent exploitation and to protect vulnerable workers,” according to the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU).

An estimated 10,000 are employed in Ireland’s domestic work sector.

Common complaints reported to Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) by domestic workers include, “long hours of work, pay below national minimum wage, no day off, no sick pay, no holiday pay, harassment, bullying, retention of identity documents and physical and mental abuse.”

MRCI spokesperson, Aoife Smith, said, “In recent years MRCI has uncovered over forty cases of forced labour and domestic servitude. We have also seen a marked increase in the exploitation of domestic workers employed by embassies and diplomatic staff in Ireland ... We need laws to criminalise forced labour and protect domestic workers employed in the homes of diplomats.”

## Slovakian steelworkers strike over unpaid wages

Around 100 employees of Metalurg Steel in Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia, went on strike April 24 over unpaid wages.

According to Metalurg Steel manager, Mr Juraj Mac, the delay in wage payments was due to the fact that the company is not able to dispatch its products on time. According to Emil Machyna, chairman of the OZ KOVO trade union, a motion for bankruptcy will be filed at Trenčín Regional Court so that resources can be drawn from the guarantee fund.

### **Jordanian potash workers strike for second week**

Workers at the Arab Potash Company (APC) in Southern Ghor, have entered the second week of their strike. The workers' demands include end of service compensation, annual pay raises, scholarships for their children and an increase in overtime payments.

### **Omani turtle sanctuary strike**

Around 40 staff at the Ras Al Jinz Scientific Research Centre continued their strike for a second day Monday.

"We had given notice to the management on April 8, and since we didn't get a reply for 20 days we decided to go on strike," Nasser Al Zedjali, an assistant guide, told *Gulf News*.

The staff action halted all turtle watching activities at the turtle reserve. Al Zedjali said that soon after control of the turtle reserve was transferred to a commercial entity, the employees were promised better conditions.

But instead, no new guides were appointed and the number of tourists permitted to watch turtles hatching was increased from 80 to 100 a night to about 180 to 200.

Al Zedjali said more visitors could keep turtles away, but "No one seems to be bothered as their only aim is to make money."

Promised increments and bonuses were not given in the last four years.

### **Nigerian doctors continue strike action**

A strike by hospital doctors in Lagos state has entered its second week. The Medical Guild is demanding the state government implement the previously agreed Consolidated Medical Salary Structure (CONMESS) and a reduction in taxes. The state government allegedly has plans to use Youth Corps members to treat emergency cases and to recruit new doctors to replace strikers.

In a separate dispute, 52 doctors at the National Orthopaedic Hospital in the south-eastern state of Enugu have struck for two weeks over alleged irregularities in the upgrading and promotion

of resident doctors. Talks between management and the Association of Resident Doctors (ARD) have failed to resolve the dispute.

### **Niger uranium mine stopped by dispute**

Around 800 workers, members of the Syntramines union, went on strike last week. They are employed on the development of the Imouraren mining project. They were striking over conditions and annual leave entitlement.

The mine is owned by the French power company Areva. It is due to come on line in 2014 and would more than double Niger's current annual output of 4,000 tonnes of uranium.

The union's general secretary threatened to bring all its members throughout the country out if Areva did not come up with an acceptable settlement

### **Liberia: Threat of go slow by civil servants**

Civil servants plan to stage an unofficial go-slow to protest the late payment of their wages and for reinstatement of sacked colleagues. The dismissals were carried out by newly enrolled Finance Minister Amara Konneh.

Delays in payment of their salaries have followed Konneh's appointment.

The proposed action has been condemned by the Civil Service Association.

### **Kenyan union federation threatens strike over hospital insurance payments**

The Kenyan Central Organisation of Trade Unions (COTU) issued a two week notice of strike action over the new rates for the National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF), which came into effect on May 1.

The notice was issued by COTU Secretary General Francis Atwoli speaking at May Day celebrations at Uhuru Park in Nairobi. Atwoli said the NHIF payments will increase the financial pressure on workers.



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