

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

11 May 2012

UK public sector strike over jobs and pensions

Some 200,000 public sector workers in the UK joined a day of protest yesterday against the coalition government's attacks on jobs and pensions.

Members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), the health section of the Unite union, and lecturers and teachers in the University and College Union, took part in the one-day strike action, with the support of the Northern Ireland civil servants' union, Nipsa.

An estimated 20,000 off-duty police officers also demonstrated in the capital against job losses and prison officers held protest meetings against plans to extend their retirement age.

The day of protest was aimed at concealing the abject capitulation by the trade unions over the government's assault on public sector pensions. Strike action last November had involved some 2.5 million workers. Since then, most of the unions have gone into talks with the government, enabling it to impose a hike in pension contributions, while the coalition brought forward legislation on its pension reforms only the day before the protest.

Speaking at a rally, PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka continued in his role of covering for the trade union bureaucracy. Claiming that the protest showed that the fight against pension reforms was not over, he called on the Trades Union Congress to reopen negotiations with the government.

Cabinet secretary, Francis Maude, responded by calling the strikes "futile" and insisting that "talks will not be reopened and nothing further will be achieved through strike action."

UK dockers in 24-hour strike over contracts

Workers at dock in Essex, England took 24-hour strike on Monday.

Forty-five dock workers were involved in a 24 hour strike at the Port of Tilbury's Enterprise Distribution Centre (EDC) in Essex, in a dispute with management over new contracts, which could lose workers around £2,500 per year.

It is the first strike by dockers at Tilbury—the principal port for London—since 1989.

UK college staff vote for strike in dispute over jobs and pay

Staff at Chesterfield College, England voted May 4 to take industrial action in a dispute over jobs and pay. Of those who cast a ballot, 88

percent voted for a strike.

A date for the industrial action is still to be announced.

The action is in response to the college management's plans to make 39 teaching staff redundant by the end of the academic year.

The web site of the University and Colleges Union (UCU) said, "The institution also intends to ignore nationally agreed pay scales and cap lecturers' annual salaries £5,000 lower than the national average".

"In addition, the college is threatening to reduce salaries for hourly-paid staff by 20 percent and to move learning support tutors on to inferior contracts."

Miners in Kazakhstan win wage demands

Miners at the Kazakh Annensky mine ended a three-day occupation on May 6 after management agreed to their wage demands. The mine is owned by Kazakhmys, one of the world's biggest copper producers.

The UK *Telegraph* reported that, "Since workers at a subsidiary of the Kazakh state energy company clashed with police in the west of the former Soviet state in December, the authorities in Kazakhstan have been extremely sensitive about wage disputes with workers. At least 16 people died in the clashes, which spread to a nearby village, damaging Kazakhstan's reputation for stability..." it said.

The dispute at the Annensky mine became even more concerning for management and the authorities as it was reported that around 300 miners had joined the original group of around 80 who had refused to return to the surface after their shift on May 4.

According to some media reports, Kazakhmys has promised the miners' further salary increases as well as a guarantee that the strikers will not be punished.

Anti-government protests set for May 22 in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic's CMKOS trade union organisation has scheduled a "series of anti-government events" for May 22.

An "information campaign" is to launch on May 14. On May 22, the union says its assembly will meet and announce its decision on a national protest and its form.

According to its website, the CMKOS assembly has the right to declare a general strike. However, as the *Prague Monitor* noted, the unions "are avoiding the word general strike".

Egyptian steel plant workers mount blockade for better pay

On May 8, around 2,000 workers from Beshay Steel factories blocked the key Cairo-Alexandria highway to demand better pay.

Ahram Online reported, “Around 9,000 workers at four steel factories in Sadat City, 50 km northwest of Cairo, have held sporadic strikes for the last month after negotiations with the company's management stalled.”

The highway was reopened after several hours.

Textile workers in Egypt strike against corruption

This week workers at Egypt's largest textile company were to begin strike action.

According to *Ahram Online*, around 20,000 workers at the Egypt Weaving and Textile Company in Mahalla City were to begin their action on Monday. Among their main demands is for a purge of corrupt officials and to be paid 12 months profit share equal to employees of the holding company.

Pay strike by port workers paralyses Yemeni container port

A pay strike by port workers paralysed the country's Aden container port, operated by United Arab Emirates-based DP World, for at least 10 days.

Aden Container Terminal is operated by a joint venture between DP World—the world's third largest port operator—and Yemen Gulf of Aden Port Corporation.

According to Reuters: “Yemen, the poorest Arab country, is still reeling from political upheaval that eventually unseated former leader Ali Abdullah Saleh and paralysed the impoverished Arabian peninsula state for most of 2011.

“The location of the small, non-OPEC oil producer on the strategically important Bab al-Mandab strait, through which millions of barrels of oil are shipped between Asia, Europe and the Americas, makes instability there a risk to global trade.”

Tuberculosis hospital workers in Swaziland enter second month of strike

Nurses and ancillary workers at the Moneni TB hospital on the outskirts of Swaziland's second largest city, Manzini, have now been on strike for more than four weeks.

A petition they presented to the Ministry of Health in April stated, “We the employees at the TB hospital have observed with dismay the lies, deceit and dishonesty... (in addressing) our plight at the TB hospital. As we speak, a number of us have perished and we don't know how many are in line.”

They say the TB hospital is death trap for them, having to treat patients with strains of multi-drug and extensively-drug resistant TB and yet lacking the facilities or procedures to prevent TB infecting health workers and doctors.

A Swazi press report of May 5 states that soldiers sent in to staff the hospital are on the verge of mutiny as they are fearful of succumbing to the disease.

Zimbabwean council workers strike

Council workers in Harare and Chitungwiza went on strike last weekend over unpaid salaries and lack of protective clothing. Their action was joined by water and engineering department employees in Harare.

Nigerian health workers strike

The Joint Health Sector Unions, representing pharmacists, nurses, midwives and other health workers declared a nation-wide strike beginning Tuesday. The strike was declared after talks in the capital, Abuja, broke down.

The action is in opposition to the current salary structure and demands for duty and shift allowances to have parity with medical and dental staff. A May 9 report in the *Nigerian Daily Trust* paper claimed many health workers were not supporting the strike call and that it only had limited support.

Striking doctors in Lagos, Nigeria sacked

Nearly 800 doctors working in Lagos state hospitals in Nigeria were sacked on May 4. Just over 300 of the doctors worked at the Lagos State University Teaching hospital with the remainder employed in hospitals throughout the state. They were represented by the Medical Guild and were demanding the state government implement the previously agreed Consolidated Medical Salary Structure. They began their strike on April 24.

Head of service at the state hospital, Adesegun Ogunlewe, announced the sackings and immediately stated that 373 doctors had been appointed to replace them and further recruitment would take place. The Medical Guild announced its intention to go to court over the sacked doctors.



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