

# 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.*

## **Pay strikes at Deutsche Bank, Commerzbank and other German banks**

A second round of strikes over pay at the nation's banks was called starting Wednesday in southern cities including Stuttgart, Karlsruhe and Mannheim.

The Verdi union is calling for a 6 percent wage increase, as well as other benefits such as better health care, after rejecting a 4.3 percent offer by the banks.

The dispute involves a potential 220,000 bank employees and workers from Germany's private and publicly owned banks. Among those directly affected are staff at Commerzbank, Deutsche Bank, Wuestenrot Bausparkasse, LBBW and Bausparkasse Schwaebisch Hall.

## **Social assistance workers across Bulgaria on one-hour warning strike**

Workers from 25 Directorates for Social Assistance across the country went on a one-hour warning strike May 18, according to the press centre of Podkrepa Confederation of Labor.

Six social assistance directorates in Sofia were affected and one from each of the cities of Sliven, Stara Zagora, Nova Zagora, Radomir, Berkovitsa, Tran, Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Lom, Ruse, Vratsa, Sandanski, Dobrich, Targovishte, Kotel, Shumen, Kazanlak, Kozloduy and Rodopi.

Between 80 percent and 100 percent of the personnel in the directorates joined the strike.

"There is no information that the strike was supported by the trade unions of Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in the social assistance system, with some individual exceptions," reported the FOCUS News Agency.

## **Disneyland Paris staff strike over pay and a sexual harassment case**

Staff at Disneyland Paris who dress up as Disney characters are withdrawing from "Meet and Greet" events an ongoing dispute over pay and a sexual harassment case.

According to media reports, there is widespread anger amongst staff at

low wages, with strikes organised for pay increases.

"This week alone there have been cancellations of the Magic on Parade event, 'Meet and Greet' sessions in Cafe Mickey, the Cowboy Cookout Barbeque, and a number of other hugely popular events," reported the *Daily Mail*.

Daniel Dreux, Disneyland's human resources manager, said a "general increase of 1.5 percent" was on the table, and appealed for "realism and common sense" from striking workers.

Disneyland staff are also in dispute over the fact that a senior colleague who was accused of harassing women has been allowed back to work because of lack of evidence.

Disney said it also denies that staff have the right to "opt out" of their duties, and has pledged to impose harsh financial penalties on strikers.

## **Rail trade union declares massive vote for strike action on Tyne and Wear metro, England**

On Wednesday, the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) confirmed that workers had voted by a big margin in two separate ballots for industrial action in disputes over pay on the Tyne and Wear metro and the victimisation of a cleaner working for Churchills cleaning company.

"The ballots came after extensive talks with the operating company DB Regio failed to produce a realistic offer this year on pay and conditions and after Churchills refused to accept that they have taken unfair disciplinary action against an RMT member," said the statement on the RMT site.

Industrial action on Tyne and Wear metro during a pension dispute last autumn led to a full shutdown of the network.

## **Staff at BBC Wales strike over victimisation as Olympic Torch arrives**

Journalists and technical staff at BBC Wales are to go on a 24-hour strike today as the Olympic Torch Relay arrives in Wales in preparation for the games.

The BBC staff are taking action over the dismissal of a member of staff, who they say was targeted due to union activity.

## **Strike at recycling sites in Sheffield, England**

Workers at five recycling sites in Sheffield, England are set to strike May 26, 27 and 28 over the closure of five sites to the public and resultant job losses.

SOVA, a sub-contractor for Sheffield City Council and Veolia, plans to shut access to the five centres to the general public on weekdays. The job losses and pay cuts arise because neither Veolia nor the City Council are willing to pay the £900,000 per annum to keep these sites open.

Workers in dispute employed by SOVA are based on all five Sheffield City Council Household Recycle Centres. Talks failed to avert the imminent job losses and cuts to terms and conditions to be enacted in June.

### **Turkish public sector workers in nationwide strike**

Turkish public sector workers staged a nationwide general strike on Wednesday in opposition to the government's pay offer of 3.5 percent for the first half of 2012. The government offer also included a 4 percent rise in the second half of the year, and a 3 percent increase for each half of 2013, and was only slightly better than its previous offer.

The strike began after negotiations between trade unions and the Ministry of Labor and Social Security ended without agreement. Strike action involved all three public sector trade union confederations. For the first time members of the three teachers trade unions all struck together.

The government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said its latest offer was final and reflected "the budget deficit, the current account deficit, the Medium-Term Financial Plan and public finance discipline."

Whilst the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions (KESK) and Kamu-Sen federations called on their members not to work, the strike was openly weakened by the Memur-Sen federation representing half a million workers. Memur-Sen left it up to the individual unions within its federation to decide whether to support the general strike or not.

### **Lebanese Electricite du Liban contract workers continue indefinite strike**

Contract workers employed by the state-run Electricite du Liban (EDL) continued their ongoing strike this week. The strikers are demanding that EDL offer them permanent employment and full benefits.

The Committee of EDL Contract Workers and Collectors, representing the workers, have stated that some of the employees have been on temporary contracts for up to 17 years, and they have not received the benefits to which they were entitled during that period. The Committee also points out that 1,700 staff at EDL are employed full-time, yet more than 5,000 workers are required.

Last week EDL workers took over and occupied various floors of the company's headquarters in Mar Mikhail and then closed the gates of the building. The strikers have also blockaded roads and held sit-ins in a number of areas.

The government is creating an atmosphere of hostility against the strikers with Energy and Water Minister Gebran Bassil stating, "We can't hire all of these people and will not bow to pressure and intimidation."

According to the *Daily Star*, "He also criticized the security forces for allowing the protesters to storm EDL's building without taking any measures to evict them."

Almost 90 percent of Electricite du Liban's bill collectors and technicians are part-time workers.

### **Social workers strike in Israel**

Social workers throughout Israel held a one-day strike Monday to protest a violent assault on a social worker's family in the village of Sakhnin. The workers are members of the Israel Association of Social Workers trade union.

On May 19 three men, all brothers, beat up the social worker's family, breaking the arm of her husband and injuring two others.

The *Jerusalem Post* reported that the union was demanding an "end to violence against social workers and was hoping to push new legislation on the issue through the Knesset Labor and Welfare Committee with the help of MKs Haim Katz and Rachel Adatto. They were also demanding protection for social workers, including adding guards at their offices, giving them greater powers and the ability to ban violent individuals."

### **Tunisian health workers issue strike notice**

Health workers belonging to the National Union of Public Sector Doctors, Dentists and Pharmacists gave notice to strike May 30-31. The union is affiliated to the Tunisian General Labour Union. The proposed action follows a breakdown in talks with employers over wages and health service improvements.

Medical staff are seeking payment for instruction given to medical students along the lines of allowances paid to university professors.

### **Liberian academics strike**

Academic staff at Cuttington University in Bong County, 120 miles north of Monrovia in Liberia, have gone on strike over salary arrears. They are also protesting the non-functioning of the on-site Internet café. The university is run by the Liberian Episcopal Church. The authorities blamed delays by the Finance Ministry for the delay in salary arrears.

### **Public transport strike in Swaziland**

Public transport workers in the city of Manzini in central Swaziland are on strike over attempts by the municipal county's attempts to make the drivers use the Satellite bus rank. They are members of the Swaziland Transport and Allied Workers Union (STAWU) and are employed by the Swaziland Commercial Amadoda Road Transport Council (SCARTO).

The Ministry of Labour went to court to get the strike action deemed illegal. STAWU officials argued that they are not on strike but taking mass coordinated leave. The judge advised the Ministry of Labour and the union to return to negotiations.

### **South African postal workers dispute continues**

Around 1,000 South African postal workers employed in the province of Gauteng, which includes Johannesburg, are continuing their strike. They are employed through labour brokers rather than directly by the post office. They are demanding to be employed on a permanent basis; some of them have been casually employed for more than 10 years.

Talks are ongoing between the Communications Workers Union and the employers. The action has led to the delays in bills and payments by municipal authorities.

### **Packaging workers strike in South Africa**

Workers employed by Wrapsa Packaging and Manufacturing based in Centurion in Gauteng province, South Africa, went on strike Monday and held a protest march.

The workers are represented by the Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union. The go-ahead for the strike was given by the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration.

Workers are seeking a pay increase, to R4500 (US\$537) from the current R1800 (\$215). According to one trade union steward, many pharmaceutical companies pay a minimum wage of R6000 (\$716). The workers also accuse the company of discrimination against black workers by paying their white staff R8000 (\$954).

One worker who had been at the company 11 years told the press, "The money I am getting (is) not enough to make a living. Most of us have lung problems because of the 'pain block' powder affecting our health ... petrol has gone up and food has gone up ... we will end up with nothing at the end of the month."

### **Rival union in South Africa declares strike at gold mine**

Workers represented by the Professional Transport and Allied Workers Union (PTAWU) at Gold One owned Modder East gold mine in South Africa have given notice of a strike June 4. Their demands include a basic salary of R6500 (\$776) and for an employer funded provident fund for underground workers.

Gold One states it only recognises the National Union of Mineworkers to represent miners, but PTAWU say that with 500 members out of 1,800 at the mine they have a right to be recognised.

### **Platinum miners in South Africa stop work**

Beginning Monday night, miners belonging to the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) refused to go underground at the Impala Platinum (Implats) Rustenburg mine.

They did so in response to hearing that some of their colleagues had been arrested. The arrests followed clashes between AMCU members and National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) members at the mine complex last week.

Some 15,000 miners staged a march to the court where their colleagues were appearing on Tuesday. A violent battle ensued with police armed with tear gas and rubber bullets. Many miners were reportedly injured.

Friction between the two union bodies follows a bitter dispute earlier in the year when AMCU members, but not NUM members, were out on

strike.

At the time, Impala Platinum refused to recognise AMCU. But according to reports, AMCU has seen an increase in numbers since the earlier dispute, with growing numbers of the miners perceiving the AMCU as a more militant organisation.

The mine currently produces around 940,000 ounces of platinum per annum; the rare metal is currently fetching around \$1,470 an ounce.



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