

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

18 January 2013

German energy workers strike

On Wednesday, the Ver.di and IG BCE unions said they would hold a strike ballot for some 30,000 workers of E.ON SE.

The unions have failed to reach an agreement with the power and gas utility company over demands for a 6.5 percent wage increase. E.ON has offered just 1.7 percent for 12 months. It previously offered a 1.1 percent increase.

The dispute also involves the extension of an agreement that ruled out layoffs, after a previous deal expired in 2012, and a deal on the long-term employment of apprentices.

E.ON is seeking to reduce operating costs by more than €2 billion (\$2.7 billion) after inflation through 2015, in response to depressed energy demand and falling wholesale power prices across much of Europe.

The energy company's proposed cuts, which include "plans to cut 11,000 jobs globally, also comes in response to an accelerated nuclear energy exit in E.ON's home market Germany, which seriously hit utilities earnings and balance sheets," according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

Teachers in Hungary to strike

Teachers are to strike next month over a threat to their jobs, related to mandatory weekly teaching hours, which they want to cap at 22 hours, and demands for a 20 percent wage increase for public employees.

The teachers have made it clear they are ready to strike even if a multi-union strike committee abandons their original demands.

According to reports, the education state secretary wants to wait for the court ruling on the minimum level of services required in the case of a strike and hold the next round of talks with unions after this.

London Underground workers ballot for strike over sackings

The Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) union is holding a ballot of staff on the London Underground to oppose the sacking of 33 agency workers employed on the Bakerloo line between Queens Park and Harrow and Wealdstone. The union will ballot all staff working on London Underground contracts with the Trainpeople agency.

In December, London Underground terminated its contract with Trainpeople, leaving staff facing the prospect of losing their jobs. It inherited the contract from Silverlink in 2007.

According to the union, for five years, London Underground continued to use agency staff in London Underground uniform while Trainpeople

paid them as little as £6.75 per hour. There have already been protests over the sackings of the 33 workers in Wembley Central and in central London.

Isle of Man bus drivers hold second strike over pay cut

Isle of Man bus drivers voted for further industrial action this week in an ongoing dispute over measures which include a £3,000 pay cut.

In December, a three-day strike led to hundreds of children on the island taking the steam train to school. Further strikes are planned for February and March.

The Department of Community Culture and Leisure said it is hoping the proposed changes will save £300,000 a year. A government spokesman said the Department needs to save £1 million in the current financial year.

Postal workers in Kent, England strike over reorganization

Postal workers at a delivery office in East Kent went on strike Saturday over the reorganisation of services.

Under plans announced by Royal Mail in 2010, the Whitstable office—where 50 postal workers work—intends to close and transfer operations to Canterbury. Postal workers would then have to sort their rounds in Canterbury before delivering the mail in Whitstable, around 8 kilometres (5 miles) away. Royal Mail said it consulted with the union before its plans were announced.

A petition in support of the workers was signed by more than 5,000 local people, and public meetings have been held in Whitstable. Around 300 joined striking postal workers on a picket line in Whitstable on Saturday morning. It was followed by a parade through the town streets.

Firefighters in Plymouth, England could strike

Firefighters in Plymouth could strike in protest at plans to cut the fire service in the wake of deep cuts announced for stations throughout the city.

If the cuts are pushed through, they would mean the gutting of services in Plymstock, Plympton—possibly leaving them with only retained crews, which take up to seven-and-half-minutes longer to respond to an emergency, Crownhill—where the aerial ladder unit would be reduced to a retained service, and Camels Head—possibly losing one of its two whole-

time crews in favour of on-call firefighters.

Government cuts have resulted in £5.5 million black hole in the Devon and Somerset budget over the next two years.

Romania railway workers strike over unpaid wages

Workers at Romania's railway operator Compania Nationala de Cai Ferate (CFR), started an unannounced strike January 16, demanding unpaid wages, according to the Bucharest-based news service *Mediafax*.

Around 90 trains were halted nationally, causing major disruption.

Egypt: Strikes by farmers, teachers, temporary workers

Al-Masry Al-Youm reported January 14, on a wave of protests nationally against poor living and working conditions.

Residents, living near Kafr al-Sheikh, protesting against continuous power outages, blocked the highway. In Sharqiya, hundreds of workers of the Rostex Company for Dyeing and Printing took industrial action for higher salaries and incentives that match the wages offered at other companies. In Giza, farmers threatened to block roads in protest against industrial wastewater being dumped in canals, contaminating arable land.

In Minya, substitute teachers staged a sit-in to demand permanent contracts and a sit-in continued at Assiut Cement, demanding better living conditions. In Ismailia temporary workers at the general hospital staged protests demanding long-term contracts and better wages.

South African farmworkers continue fight for living wage

The fight by farmworkers for a R150 a day wage continues as protests by strikers are met with police attacks.

Police opened fire on around 800 workers protesting in Nkqubela, Robertson. The police continued to fire on the workers as they retreated back to their communities, and there were reports of workers being injured.

Meanwhile the COSATU union federation, part of the government, is trying to impose a settlement that workers in the Clanwilliam area accepted. The workers there returned to work after accepting an employers' R105 a day offer. COSATU are continuing to negotiate with the farm owners association Agri SA using the Clanwilliam agreement to get a Western Cape-wide agreement.

On Monday, Letsekang Thokoane, 25, originally from Lesotho, was killed in De Doorns in Western Cape after being beaten and shot at with rubber bullets by police. A shop assistant, he got caught up in the brutality being handed out to farmworkers in the area.

South Africa Amplats workers strike to oppose job losses

Miners working for Anglo American Platinum (Amplats) refused to begin their shift Tuesday night. Gaddhafi Mdoda, a workers' representative, said they had taken the action in light of the threat by

Amplats to close operations resulting in the loss of 14,000 jobs. Amplats stated 13,000 of the jobs would be lost around Rustenburg, the scene of big struggles by miners in August and September of last year.

Dairy product workers strike at South African factory enters third month

Workers at the Dairy Belle factory in Bloemhof have been on strike since November, fighting for a substantial wage increase. The company has refused to budge on its 6 percent offer and is threatening to remove a 20 percent nightshift allowance and milk allowance. COSATU organised a march to the company headquarters on Wednesday.

ANC propose ban on strikes by South Africa's teachers

The African National Congress government has issued a proposal to categorise teaching as an essential service, which would make any strike action illegal. The ANC is seeking to scapegoat teachers for the poor level of education leading to a poorly skilled workforce. A survey carried out by the World Economic Forum in November last year ranked South Africa last amongst 62 countries in terms of math and science education.

Mozambican doctors' strike enters second week

Last week doctors began a strike to press their demand for a basic wage of US\$3,000 a month. The mainly young recently qualified doctors who initiated the strike have been joined by older consultants supporting their action.

The Mozambique Medical Association (MMA) has been involved in negotiations with the Ministry of Health. Some reports indicate the government wants public sector wage levels to be part of the annual tripartite negotiations between the government, trade unions and employers associations that normally take place in March and April.



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