

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

22 February 2013

## Europe

### Italian public transport workers strike over government austerity measures

Public transportation workers went on strike Wednesday across the country to protest the government's austerity measures, pay and job cuts. The industrial action involves tram, bus and metro workers and caused traffic jams across the capital, Rome.

Italy's parliamentary elections take place February 24 and 25.

The present industrial action follows a series of strikes and protests against the austerity package of spending cuts and pension changes being imposed by the government of Prime Minister Mario Monti.

### Security workers at Hamburg and Cologne airports in pay strike

Security workers at Hamburg and Cologne airports went on strike February 15 over a pay dispute, resulting in over 200 flight cancellations.

The Verdi union is officially seeking a roughly 30 percent pay increase for the private security workers. Employers have offered only a 9 percent deal.

Staff at Hamburg, Duesseldorf and Cologne-Bonn airports recently staged several "warning strikes" to press for salary increases.

### Civil servants at UK Department of Education vote to strike

Civil servants in the Department for Education (DfE) have voted to strike over plans for 50 percent cuts that threaten 1,000 jobs and six UK offices. This is the first time that industrial action has been voted for in the current department.

In a ballot of around 1,800 staff in the DfE, almost two-thirds of those balloted said they would be prepared to strike and 86.9 percent voted for other forms of industrial action, including working to rule.

The department announced last autumn it would be shedding more than a quarter of its workforce. The announcement followed a review led by global management consultancy Bain and Company.

### UK postal workers' ballot on industrial action

Around 4,000 postal workers are being balloted on industrial action over an ongoing dispute concerning job security and pay.

Last year, the Post Office announced plans to franchise 70 Crown offices in a move that would see the network cut by 20 percent and put over 700 jobs at risk.

The ballot by the Communication Workers Union (CWU) is to be concluded by March 8.

### Strike by BBC journalists disrupts radio and TV news programmes

A 24-hour strike Monday by BBC journalists, at risk of compulsory redundancy, disrupted radio and TV news programmes across the network.

Flagship Radio 4 programmes including "Today", "The World at One, PM" and "The World Tonight" were replaced with pre-recorded material. National and regional TV news bulletins were also affected.

Some journalists mounted picket lines outside BBC offices and studios across the UK.

The BBC announced that it was "disappointed" with the industrial action, adding that it would not alter its intentions to make "significant" savings.

The BBC is cutting around 2,000 jobs under its "delivering quality first" programme. The corporation has said 554 employees have left as a result of voluntary redundancy, 186 had been redeployed, and there have been 153 compulsory redundancies.

Journalists across the BBC—in Scotland, BBC South, the Asian Network, Newsbeat, Five Live, the World Service and English Regions—are at risk of compulsory redundancy, according to the National Union of Journalists (NUJ).

RTE said: "The NUJ said it had not ruled out further industrial action, but was calling for more talks over compulsory redundancies and a moratorium on job cuts until new director general Tony Hall takes over in April."

### Staff at largest theatre operator in the UK in dispute over pay

Hundreds of staff involved in a dispute over pay at the Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG), the largest theatre operator in the UK, could go on strike.

Union BECTU has said that it intends to ballot its members who work for ATG if the group does not address concerns over its proposals to move staff from weekly to monthly pay.

"BECTU, whose members work in both front of house and backstage

roles for the operator, claims the move—which ATG has blamed on legal requirements to introduce automatic enrolment of staff into a pensions scheme—will have a negative impact on employees. It said it had registered a dispute with the company,” according to thestage.co.uk.

### **School bus drivers in Ireland strike over pay and conditions**

School bus drivers employed by Bus Éireann in the Galway area are to go on industrial action from today over ongoing attempts by management to undermine the workers’ pay and conditions.

Workers voted overwhelmingly to take industrial action to protect their conditions of employment.

The drivers are members of the public service union SIPTU, which has said that further industrial action is scheduled for March 1, 7 and 8.

### **Scottish BP tanker drivers begin four-day strike in dispute over pay, pensions**

Tanker drivers employed by BP, at the Grangemouth refinery near Falkirk, Scotland, are to begin a four-day strike from this morning in a dispute over pay and pensions. The Unite union said 90 percent of the drivers voted for industrial action.

The union claims the strike would cause “significant disruption” to Scotland’s transport infrastructure, threatening fuel supplies to all airports and scores of petrol forecourts north of the border and in the North East of England.

The dispute originated out of the transfer of a key fuel transport contract from BP to a new employer, DHL.

Unite says the drivers stand to lose more than £1,400 a year in pay which was tied to a BP share purchase scheme when they begin work under the new contract and as much as £100,000 from the value of their pension. BP posted profits worth more than £7.6 billion in 2012.

Last year, tanker drivers working for Wincanton and supplying forecourts across east and central England took over two weeks of industrial action in a dispute over pay, pensions and training, followed by a three-month dispute with the UK’s six major fuel distribution companies.

Failing a settlement in the dispute, the second four-day strike is due to begin February 28.

#### **Middle East**

### **Egyptian medical interns stage protest outside health ministry**

“Hundreds of doctors’ interns from the Intern Doctors Movement demonstrated outside the Egyptian Ministry of Health in downtown Cairo on Sunday to demand better pay and work conditions,” reported *Ahram Online* on February 17.

The news source said the protest involved demands for the reactivation of the *takleef* system, which assigns graduates temporary positions as part of their training, and for work bonuses for commissioned doctors.

During November and December, doctors staged a national strike to demand an increase in public health spending, wage increases, better health care standards and increased security at hospitals.

## **Africa**

### **Teachers join Malawi civil servants’ strike**

On Tuesday teachers represented by the Teachers Union of Malawi (TUM) joined the nationwide strike by Malawi civil servants that began last week. Leaders of TUM met with the Civil Service Trade Union (CSTU) leaders to iron out differences and join the action begun by the CSTU. Teachers in Malawi represent 70 percent of the country’s civil servants.

They are striking to support their demands for substantial pay increases in light of steep increases in the cost of living. Malawi President Joyce Banda appealed to the civil servants to return to work and to continue negotiations on their grievances.

### **Nigerian university staff threatens to strike**

Workers in tertiary education institutions in Plateau State, represented by the umbrella organisation, Joint Unions of Plateau State-Owned Tertiary Institutions, have threatened to come out on strike on Friday if the state government does not meet their demands.

The unions accuse the state government of outstanding salary arrears from 2011 and also of tampering with salary tables set by the National Incomes, Salaries and Wages Commission.

### **Nigerian railway strike ended after one day**

Workers represented by the Nigerian Union of Railway Workers and the Senior Staff Association employed by the Nigerian Railway Corporation came out on indefinite strike on Monday. All gates and offices of the corporation HQ in Ebute-Metta in Lagos were locked and no train services ran.

They were protesting the lack of promotion, the recruitment of higher grade officers from outside the company, passing over those already employed and the lack of insurance for drivers.

However, following a meeting on Monday night between the unions and the Railway Corporation a memorandum of agreement was signed and the workers returned to work Tuesday. It is not clear what the terms of agreement entailed.

### **One-day strike of miners at South African Amplats mine**

Miners at the Siphumelele mine in the Rustenburg region, owned by platinum mining company Amplats (Anglo American Platinum), held a one-day strike on Tuesday.

This followed events on Monday when around 1,000 miners surrounded the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) office on the site demanding its closure. The miners—members of the Association of Mine Workers and Construction Union (AMCU)—said the NUM no longer represented them. Security guards employed by Amplats responded to the gathering by

firing rubber bullets injuring some of the workers.

Amplats is currently carrying out a verification process for union representation at its Rustenburg sites. Under South African law only one union at a particular workplace can operate as a bargaining partner. The union must represent at least 51 percent of the workforce to be recognised. According to Amplats, AMCU membership at the site is 60 percent but the company is awaiting the results of an audit before agreeing to recognise the union as a bargaining partner.

The return to work on Wednesday followed a meeting between the workers and AMCU president Joseph Mathunjwa.

The shares of the company fell by 4 percent following news of the workers' demands for the NUM to be expelled from the site. Last month the company announced its intention to downsize its operations and cut 14,000 jobs.



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