

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

8 March 2013

## Hundreds of striking Iberia airline workers protest in Madrid

Hundreds of striking Iberia airline workers protested in Madrid Wednesday against plans to cut 3,800 jobs and wages, following a merger with British Airways.

Iberia ground and flight staff began a second five-day strike on Monday against the planned job and pay cuts. The action forced the cancellation of 1,370 flights.

Iberia workers carried out the first of their three five-day strikes last week and plan another from March 18 to 22.

## Demonstration in Athens against budget cuts

Thousands of primary and secondary state schoolteachers and higher education students demonstrated at the weekend in the capital, Athens, against education budget cuts. Greece is in its fifth year of recession, due to savage austerity measures imposed by the New Democracy-PASOK-Democratic Left coalition government at the behest of the European Union and the International Monetary Fund.

Amid rising unemployment and poverty, essential social provision is being run into the ground. Many schools are barely able to function. There is a shortage of books and tuition materials, while many schools are reportedly unable to pay utility bills.

Last week in central Greece, five university students suffered carbon monoxide poisoning from a makeshift home-heating stove they were using because they could not afford proper heating oil. Two died, and three are in critical condition.

## Greek doctors, hospital staff call go-slow

Resident doctors at the General Hospital of Serres in northern Greece began a "go-slow" Monday in protest at pay delays.

Around 70 percent of the hospital's residents have joined the action, saying that they have not been paid for emergency shifts since August.

Thessaloniki's Papageorgiou Hospital started accepting only emergency cases on Tuesday as the institution's 1,450 staff launched a go-slow action to protest the non-payment of wages last month.

## Yorkshire ambulance workers hold strike vote

Ambulance workers in Yorkshire are voting on whether to strike over ambulance service plans to introduce emergency care assistants to work alongside more highly trained paramedics.

Paramedics currently undergo a two-year degree course to train for correct patient response skills. The proposed emergency care assistants will be made to respond to emergencies after only six weeks of training.

The health trust, which intends to claw back £46 million in savings over the next five years, defended the move as due to the "realities of the tough economic climate."

## London roads maintenance workers strike

Roads maintenance workers in north London are to begin an indefinite strike from next Monday, March 11, over threatened redundancies.

In a move that demonstrates their support for the principle of cutting jobs, union officials said they have put an alternative redundancy proposal to Brent Council that has been rejected.

## UK public sector workers vote to strike

Public sector workers have voted to strike over government-imposed cuts in pay, pensions and working conditions.

The Public and Commercial Services union ballot of its members showed 61 percent backing for strikes, while eight in every 10 agreed to some form of industrial action. Turnout was just 28 percent.

The union is officially seeking a 5 percent wage increase for its members.

According to the Office for Budget Responsibility, almost 1 million public-sector jobs are to be slashed between 2011 and 2017 as part of its austerity measures.

## Lecturers at UK college agree one-day strike

Lecturers at Longley Park Sixth Form College in Sheffield have voted to go on a one-day strike next Thursday over potentially compulsory redundancies.

The college is cutting its budget by £1 million in the next academic year, leading in the loss of around 20 percent of the workforce as well as changes to the curriculum.

Longley Park opened in 2004 and has more than 1,300 students, mainly

aged between 16 and 18.

### **Workers at the Cross Keys Swing Bridge, Lincolnshire, to strike**

Workers at the Cross Keys Swing Bridge, a major route in and out of Lincolnshire, will strike next week following a unanimous vote in favour of industrial action after Lincolnshire County Council proposed pay cuts.

The council is imposing new terms and conditions from March 10 that will see the workers lose at least 13.5 percent of their wages, including weekend enhancements and paid breaks for staff on call for four hours before and after their shift.

### **Egyptian newspaper journalists strike**

Journalists at the *Al-Dostour* newspaper have gone on strike after unannounced cuts to their pay. According to the *Daily News Egypt*, the reporters also accused the *Al-Dostour* chairman of enforcing arbitrary suspensions.

“Social security inspectors arrived after receiving a complaint from the journalists against the newspaper’s Chairman Reda Edward. The journalists are accusing Edward of refusing to provide them with insurance and employment contracts. They added that Edward resorts to arbitrary suspensions when dealing with some journalists without providing any reasons for the suspension,” said *Daily News Egypt*.

In a statement, the journalists said that some of them have been working at the newspaper for five years without a contract. They are demanding a minimum wage of EGP 1,200 (US\$178) and contracts for all journalists. They are also demanding a ban on managers interfering with the newspaper’s editorial policy.

### **Hundreds of protesters break into Iraqi oilfield**

Hundreds of unemployed protesters broke into Iraq’s giant southern West Qurna-2 oilfield on Monday to demand jobs, Reuters reported. It cites police and security personnel stating that offices were wrecked during the protest.

West Qurna-2 is being developed by Russia’s Lukoil and is expected to begin producing up to 140,000 barrels of oil per day by the end of the year.

The police called in the army after the protesters stormed offices and smashed surveillance cameras at the oilfield.

“At least 400 angry protesters breached the main gate and broke into West Qurna oilfield,” an official at West Qurna Phase 2 told Reuters. “Most of the foreign and local staff left the field as a safety measure and work was significantly affected.”

Police sources said the protesters trashed the offices of an Iraqi company hired by Samsung Engineering before trying to break into its headquarters.

On February 19, hundreds of workers chanting “People’s oil is not for the people, but for thieves” protested against the South Oil Company in Iraq and called for housing, permanent work and payment of delayed benefits.

### **Lonmin miners in South Africa shut down two shafts**

Two shafts at Lonmin platinum mines were shut when miners failed to report for work. Around 3,500 miners at the Saffy shaft and over 2,000 at the Newman shaft refused to attend. According to a company spokesman, the stoppage, now ended, led to the loss of a thousand ounces of platinum production.

The miners are demanding the closure of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) offices at the site. Lonmin accept that the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) now has majority representation at the site but is still in the process of making AMCU the sole recognised union at the site.

### **March of South African farmworkers cancelled**

A planned march by Cape Western farmworkers to parliament, due to take place on Saturday March 2, was cancelled. The organisers accused the City of Cape Town of blocking the march, which they claimed would have attracted over 10,000 workers. The march was part of the campaign for a higher minimum wage.

Farmworkers were involved in strikes last year to push for a minimum R150 (US\$16.50) wage, but following intervention by COSATU this was reduced to R105 (US\$11.50). This reduced minimum was due to come into force Friday, March 1.

According to the Farmworkers Strike Coalition, 80 percent of farmworkers in the De Doorns region of the West Cape will not receive this R105 (US\$11.5) minimum wage. Agri-SA, the farmers’ employers body who had signed up to the R105 (US\$11.5) wage deal, are now saying they do not make enough money to fund the increase. Many farmworkers report their employers are pressuring them to sign up for a R85 (US\$9) wage with the threat of losing their jobs if they do not sign.

### **Ghana banana workers strike**

Around 1,800 workers at Golden Exotics banana plantation located in a free trade zone went out on strike February 26. They are members of the General Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) and are demanding a 25 percent pay increase.

A National Labour Commission (NLC) hearing declared the strike illegal, arguing that negotiations were taking place. This line was backed by the GAWU union. The NLC broadcast messages via local radio calling on the workers to return to work, or be deemed in contempt of court.

### **Sudan doctors’ strike**

Doctors working at El Fasher’s hospitals in North Darfur went out on strike on Sunday after the government failed to pay three months’ salary. They are also seeking better working conditions, overtime pay, and bonuses.

## **Nigerian health workers stage protest**

Doctors and nurses at the National hospital in Abuja began a three-day warning strike on Monday to protest the hospital's failure to implement a Conditions of Service agreement from 2010. The health workers said they would picket the hospital each morning to demand its implementation. They are also demanding the current hospital administrator be made to stand down.



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