

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

15 March 2013

Europe

Security workers at Düsseldorf airport strike

Security workers at Düsseldorf airport took action Monday over a demand for improved wages. Severe flight delays and cancellations were experienced at Germany's third largest airport. The Verdi union is officially seeking a pay increase of up to 30 percent for private security workers.

A strike over similar demands took place at Cologne airport last week. According to Verdi, up to 80 percent of security staff in the region earn just €8.23 per hour.

UK postal staff vote for action

Around 4,000 post office counter staff voted last week to go on strike, in a dispute over pay and job security.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) said that 88 percent of members voted to strike in a 75 percent turnout.

Postal workers have not had a pay rise for almost two years. They are also opposing closure changes to the UK's network of 373 main post offices. Last month, the Post Office announced plans to close up to 70 main offices and replace them with franchises based in shops.

The CWU has made no announcements about possible strike dates.

Support staff in Sheffield schools protest over "living wage"

Two-dozen workers employed by Carillion as support staff in schools in Sheffield are to take industrial action today over the building services contractors' refusal to apply the "living wage".

Sheffield City Council recently agreed to become a "living wage employer"—a minimum pay rate of £7.45 per hour—from April 2013.

Carillion has also refused to pay a lump sum of £250 due from when the workers were first outsourced from the council to the contractor almost two years ago.

Staff at Spain's historical sites to strike

Around 500 workers employed by National Heritage, the state body charged with looking after Spain's palaces and other historical sites, will take industrial action March 28 and March 29. They are protesting government measures that have slashed their wages by 15 percent and extended their working hours.

Staff including gardeners, waiters, cooks and other workers at the royal palaces will go on strike for the first time.

Among other sites to be affected will be Madrid's vast Royal Palace, the Valley of the Fallen mausoleum, where the fascist dictator General Francisco Franco is buried, and the Escorial Palace near Madrid.

Ambulance centre workers in Tbilisi walk-out

Ambulance centre workers in the Georgian capital Tbilisi were to take industrial action this week over the unexplained dismissal of several colleagues.

According to reports, the workers have already begun a hunger strike.

The *Moscow Times* stated that the "ambulance centre's administration is putting pressure on the workers, attempting not to let the strike to acquire a mass character. They are threatening to dismiss everyone who would take part in the strike."

Irish psychiatric nurses' work-to-rule

Irish psychiatric nurses are to implement a work-to-rule in protest at the measures proposed under the government-union-negotiated no-strike agreement, Croke Park II.

From March 19, around 7,000 nurses are to refuse to use their personal mobile phones and personal cars for work purposes and to adhere strictly to their rosters. The National Ambulance Service Representative Association is to join the action, stopping the use of personal phones and computers. **Middle East**

Iranian metal workers protest non-payment of wages

More than 700 workers and retired employees in the metal industry gathered outside the governor's office in Tehran on Sunday. They have not received their wages for the past four months as well as their New Year bonus.

The workers said that despite repeated protests, the authorities had not responded to their demands.

South Asian labourers down tools in Oman

Thousands of South Asian labourers working on the expansion of Muscat airport in Oman downed tools after a colleague died in an accident on site.

According to Reuters, the Indian worker died late on Monday when he was run over by a bus belonging to the contractor.

"We will not go to work today unless our company assures us that they will revise safety standards in our workplace," Mohan Raman, a worker with BEB, told *Reuters*.

The work stoppage is expected to further delay the US\$1.8 billion contract to build a new terminal, which the government awarded in 2010 to BEB, a joint venture of US company Bechtel and Turkey's Enka. **Africa**

South African construction workers' strike resumes

Construction workers belonging to the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) working on the construction of the Medupi power station for the Eskom public utility originally came out on strike on January 16 over a dispute of non-payment of end-of-year bonuses.

The workers returned to work on Monday of this week as the various contracting firms working on the Eskom Medupi site agreed to pay a one-off payment of R2000 (US\$216) plus a month's salary and the offer of an interest-free loan equivalent to the value of 90 hours' work to be paid back over six months.

The dispute resumed when workers said the contractors had reneged on the deal.

South African coal miners in wildcat action

Coal miners at five mines run by the coal producer Exxaro came out on strike last week. Around 3,500 miners involved in the action are demanding the payment of performance bonuses.

Talks between the National Union of Mineworkers and Exxaro management are taking place.

Analysts warned a prolonged stoppage could threaten coal supplies, but Exxaro insisted it has sufficient stockpiles to be able to supply Eskom.

Strike by oil workers in Gabon

Oil workers belonging to the ONEP union went out on strike on Saturday last week. They are demanding the implementation of an agreement signed in November 2010 with the government for better working conditions.

A union spokesman said 90 percent of oil companies were affected. The two main companies operating in the country are French-owned Total and Royal Dutch Shell. The country produces around a quarter of a million barrels of crude oil a day.

Tunisian airport workers threaten action

Airport workers belonging to the General Federation of Transportation (GFT) have threatened a three-day strike beginning March 18. It is in response to the failure of the Office of Civil Aviation and Airports (OACA) to implement an agreement signed on February 4 to increase salaries by 30 percent.

The airport workers demanded a 30 percent increase after OACA increased the salaries of air traffic controllers last year but did not make any offer to other, lower-paid, airport workers.

Nigerian teachers' strike continues

The teachers' strike that began in February in Nigeria's northeastern state of Bauchi continues. Last August, the state government announced it would have to make half of the teachers redundant to save money.

The job cuts were averted after teachers volunteered to sacrifice 10 percent of their salaries for four months up to December. However, the state government continued to pay the teachers the reduced amount after the December deadline, leading to the walkout.

The state government is threatening to sack the striking teachers and replace them with 5,000 newly recruited teachers.

National Railways of Zimbabwe workers demand back pay

Around 450 railway workers, represented by several unions, went on strike Monday. They work for National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ). They are owed eight months' back pay totalling US\$ 31 million.

They are also protesting the lack of maintenance of the railway stock, claiming the trains have no functional brake pads and that lines are damaged and pose a risk to staff and passengers.



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