

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

22 March 2013

## German rail workers in rush-hour strike

German railway workers went on a two-hour national strike in the rush hour on Monday morning to demand improved wages.

The dispute involved at least 130,000 employees of Deutsche Bahn demanding a wage increase of 6.5 percent.

In previous negotiations February, Deutsche Bahn offered a two-stage package consisting of an increase of 2.4 percent from May 1, 2013, and an additional 2 percent from April next year.

## Lufthansa staff in pay strike

On Wednesday, the Verdi trade union announced it had called on 33,000 employees at Germany's flagship airline Lufthansa to walk off their jobs in Frankfurt, Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and other airports on Thursday to demand a 5.2 percent pay increase.

The union said Lufthansa's operations in Frankfurt and Hamburg would be most affected by the walkout ahead of the next round of wage talks scheduled for Friday. The airline said it wants to freeze wages and ask employees to work one hour more per week in an effort to compete with its rivals.

## UK civil servants strike on Budget Day

UK civil servants staged a strike over cuts to pay and pensions to coincide with Budget Day, on Wednesday.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) trade union said tens of thousands of its members demanding a 5 percent pay rise, or £1,200, walked out at government departments, job centres, tax offices and airport border controls.

A rally was held in Westminster to coincide with Chancellor George Osborne's budget speech and picket lines were mounted outside government offices, museums, galleries and the Houses of Parliament.

The PCS has called a half-day strike on April 5 as part of a three-month "rolling campaign."

## Strike by Greek rail workers

A strike by members of the Panhellenic Federation of Rail Workers will start Saturday and end Monday, over demands that national rail operator TrainOSE sign a collective labour agreement. The rail workers accuse management of preparing wage cuts.

TrainOSE and suburban (Proastiakos) rail services will not run during the strike, which will affect the Athens Metro service between Athens airport and Doukissis Plakentias station.

The Panhellenic Union of Stationmasters has also said it will hold nighttime work stoppages from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. from March 26 to 29.

## Finnair staff strike over job cuts

Employees of the airline Finnair struck Thursday over planned job cuts in its technical services operations.

The airline had earlier announced that it planned to cut up to 310 of 900 jobs in technical operations as it speeds up restructuring efforts.

## Mahalla, Egypt hit by protests, strikes

On Monday the Egyptian city of Mahalla was brought to standstill by protests and strikes against the Muslim Brotherhood regime. Around 1,300 factories were closed. The entrances and exits of the city were blocked off, and public transportation was halted as a result.

According to Egyptian television, bus drivers and taxi drivers went on strike in protest at recurrent shortages of diesel fuel.

"Since the second anniversary of the January 25 revolution, a number of cities such as Port Said, Mansoura, Tanta and Mahalla have witnessed extended protests and calls for civil disobedience," said *Ahram Online*.

Last month, hundreds in Mahalla went on strike and blockaded the main routes into the city. Strikes by Mahalla workers in 2006 and in 2008 fed the rise of industrial militancy in the Egyptian

working class that led to the 2011 revolution.

### **Israel Chemicals faces dispute against Potash deal**

Hundreds of employees of the Israel Chemicals Ltd at Dead Sea Works launched an industrial dispute Monday. They are opposing negotiations on a possible merger of Israel Chemicals, controlled by Israel Corporation, with Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan Inc.

They accuse management of a lack of transparency about the merger talks, meant to conclude within a month. The government owns a major share in Israel Chemicals, which currently employs 5,000 workers at its facilities in the south.

Israel Chemicals employees fear that an acquisition will endanger their jobs, result in the transfer of operations to Jordan, and terminate the company's development plans for the south.

### **Wildcat action by South African miners**

The strike by more than 3,000 South African miners at five Exxaro coal mines, which began March 5, is ongoing. The dispute is over non-payment of bonuses. Although not initiated by the National Unions of Mineworkers (NUM), the union is negotiating with the employers only in an attempt to settle the dispute.

The company has won an urgent interdict from the Labour Court to end the strike, but to date has chosen not to enforce it hoping to resolve the strike through the NUM.

An underground unofficial sit-in strike involving around 100 copper miners at Palabora Mining's (Palamin) mine in Limpopo entered its second week Tuesday. The underground workers are being supported by others at the surface.

They are seeking an underground allowance for dangerous work. Again unofficial, the NUM is attempting to negotiate a settlement.

### **South African postal strike enters second month**

The strike by postal workers at sorting offices in Johannesburg entered its second month this week. The workers began the strike February 14 over pension money owed them.

The South African Post Office (SAPO) has begun issuing dismissal notices to the nearly 600 workers. SAPO has said it will begin hiring temporary staff to clear the backlog of undelivered letters.

### **Teachers in Ghana strike**

Ghanaian teachers began a nationwide strike Monday to protest irregularities in a new pay policy.

A ruling from the Labour Commission has instructed the teachers to return to work while Fair Wages and Salaries Commission officials investigate their grievances.

The action was a result of an initiative by the rank and file.

### **Nigerian lecturers continue strike**

Lecturers working in Osun State colleges in Nigeria have been on strike since March 11 over the failure of the state government to contribute to their pension scheme and other issues.

They have been supported by the Education Rights Campaign. Students at the Osun State College of Education Ilesa demonstrated in support of the strikers, but were dispersed by armed police using teargas. Four students were arrested.

### **Niger uranium miners in three-day strike**

Around 700 miners at the China National Nuclear Corporation uranium mine in northern Niger began a three-day strike this week. Their demands include better wages and bonus payments.

A spokesman reported that management had refused to pay allowances and a production bonus, breaking promises made last year.

The Nigerien government has a one-third stake in the mine, which began production in 2011 and expects to have a 2,500-ton output by 2015.

### **Kenyan local government workers strike**

Around 2,500 municipal workers, members of the Kenya Local Government Workers Union (KLGWU) in Mombasa, are on strike over two month salary arrears.

Some have lost their homes because they did not have money for rent, while others have not been able to pay their children's school fees. Others have run out of food.

KLGWU has directed its lawyers to sue the council over the non-payment of the wages.



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