

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

28 June 2013

## Swedish bus drivers' strike expands

Bus drivers in Sweden, protesting working conditions and pay, began a strike June 19 initially affecting Stockholm, Södertälje and Umeå. The action spread to other cities across the country days later. As of June 24, 1,400 staff were affected, including bus drivers in Norrköping, Strängnäs, Halmstad, Västerås and Hallstahammar as well as engineering and service staff in Gävle and Östersund.

The workers are demanding that scheduling be reviewed to prevent the current situation of up to 13-hour days with few breaks.

Staff are also demanding a wage increase of 1,760 kronor (\$263) per month over three years and an employment guarantee when a new operator takes over bus contracts.

A further expansion of the strike is expected from June 29 if the dispute is not resolved. This will affect, among other services, airport coaches.

## Eiffel Tower staff take industrial action

Around 300 staff at the Eiffel Tower, in Paris, France began a 48-hour strike Tuesday for better working conditions and improved pay. The employees are mostly members of the CGT trade union.

The strike meant that the Eiffel Tower, the world's most visited monument with around 25,000 visitors a day, was closed at the height of the tourist season.

The strike was the first since a two-day shutdown in December 2010.

Workers also had grievances over the fact that one of the five tower lifts, due to have been renovated and operational following a decision taken in 2008 was still not ready, putting further pressure on staff.

"The waiting lines are growing longer, the visitors are growing more and more impatient and the work conditions are deteriorating," said a trade union statement.

## 24-hour stoppage on Northern Ireland train service

Staff on the Translink train service in Northern Ireland staged a 24-hour stoppage Monday in a dispute over pay and terms and conditions.

The strike follows rejection of a pay settlement by the vast majority of Translink's 3,700 staff.

## UK power station construction workers strike

Around 670 construction workers building a power station in Runcorn, England have taken unofficial industrial action over allegations of bullying. The June 22 strike at Runcorn Thermal Power Station—the largest of its type in Europe—brought work on the £65 million project to a halt.

Workers said they would continue to strike until the dispute was resolved. An unnamed worker told the *Liverpool Echo*, "There are 700 people who work there and if nothing changes over the weekend then it will be an official picket line. There has been lots of bullying and intimidation going on and the union is trying to negotiate with them. We are sticking to our guns this time."

When complete, the new power station at Weston Point is expected to convert non-recyclable waste from Greater Manchester and Cheshire into energy.

In January, 600 staff, including electricians, steel fabricators and insulation workers, walked out for a week over the standard of toilets and catering facilities.

## Refuse collection workers in south London set to strike

Refuse collection workers in Bromley and Croydon in south London are set to strike for three days next week over a 2 percent pay offer from the French corporation Veolia. The strike is set to run July 2 to July 4.

Workers rejected the Veolia offer and are seeking a rise in line with the current retail price index of 3.1 percent.

It has been reported that the dispute over pay could spread to the London borough of Camden, where refuse collectors are also employed by Veolia and have also rejected the 2 percent offer in a consultative ballot. The Camden workers could also be balloted for industrial action, if the dispute is not settled.

The accounts of Veolia Environmental Services UK PLC reveal that the group operating profit for year ending December 2011 was £121 million—a 20 percent increase.

## Care staff in the west of Scotland balloted on industrial action

Staff employed by Cornerstone Community Care, in the west of Scotland, are being balloted on industrial action following proposals to cut 155 support workers' jobs.

Cornerstone has said that those who are unsuccessful in securing their own jobs will be demoted to a support assistant role. This could mean pay cuts of up to £3,000.

Cornerstone saw a surplus of approximately £375,000 last year, but the

organisation claims it cannot sustain the current levels of support workers.

### **Oman petroleum company employees go on strike**

Oil workers struck at two Omani private petrochemical companies Monday. According to gulfnews.com the workers are employed by the Oman Methanol Holding Company (OMC), an Omar Zawawi Establishment joint venture with Trinidad-based Methanol Holding International Limited (MHIL).

The OMC staff struck at the Sohar Industrial Port. Dalma Energy employees at Muscat also went on strike.

Strikers are fighting the non-compliance by the company of the Manpower Ministry's decision mandating annual salary increases for private sector workers in Oman.

The decision of the ministry, which came into effect in January, last year, decrees that every private sector employee is entitled to a three percent salary increase every year.

The Dalma Energy workers are striking for comprehensive health coverage for family members and comprehensive salary during annual leave. Employees are also demanding removal of the company's human resource manager.

### **Yemini street cleaners protest at residence of Yemini president**

Street cleaners protested Tuesday outside the residence of Yemini President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. Hundreds of workers were involved in the protest. They are threatening strike action to protest the government reneging on an agreement to hire them as government workers.

Speaking to the *Yemen Times*, Sadeq Ali Ahmed, head of the preparatory committee of the Municipalities and Housing Union and the director of waste facilities in Taiz, said workers have not been provided with government jobs or the promised health insurance.

In April, the cleaners threatened to stop work but relented after the mayor of Sana'a Abdulqader Hilal asked for three months to meet their demands. At that time the Street Cleaners Union stated, "This is the last chance for the government to meet the legal demands that we have demanding for 15 years."

### **Israeli Foreign Ministry employees dispute continues**

"Foreign Ministry employees heightened their 3-month old labor dispute Sunday by halting virtually all consular services abroad. The only exceptions will be emergencies, the repatriation of bodies to Israel and procedures relating to adoption and surrogacy," reported *Ha'aretz* Sunday.

Staff are demanding a collective agreement and they are disputing the erosion of their salary. They are also calling for a procedure for compensating spouses who are living abroad but not working, and the halting of double taxation of diplomats.

The Finance Ministry recently took the decision to deduct wages of workers involved in the dispute.

The workers' contract expired months ago, and union officials say that the majority of staff at Israeli institutions abroad are not earning enough

money to pay their bills.

### **Algerian catering workers end strike**

The more than 1,000 catering workers employed by three subcontractors at the Algerian state petrochemical company Sonatrach returned to work at the end of last week. They had struck against low wages, poor conditions and degrading treatment by management.

Nineteen elected worker representatives had been sacked by the subcontractors but the companies agreed to reinstate the 19 and begin negotiations if the workers ended their strike.

### **March by protesting Zimbabwean teachers blocked**

Last week, members of the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) attempted to march to the office of the Education Minister, David Coltart, in Harare. However, police blocked the march, telling the marchers they did not have police permission because they had failed to tell them the route of the march and the number participating.

PTUZ was protesting the compulsory transfers of teachers mainly from urban areas to rural areas. It said hundreds of teachers from Harare alone had been subjected to this compulsory relocation.

They were also protesting the taking of bribes by education officials from temporary teachers recruited to replace the transferred teachers, the implication being that transfers were engineered so the officials could then offer temporary posts and be financially compensated.

### **Malawi rail workers strike**

Malawian construction workers building a railway line from Malawi to the Mozambique port of Nacala went on strike at the beginning of this week. They are employed by the Portuguese company Mota Engil. They are protesting the company's plan to replace some of the Malawi workers, earning K20, 000 (\$61) a month with Thai workers on K450, 000 (\$1,370) a month.

They are also protesting summary dismissals of Malawian workers on the project without recourse to a hearing.

### **Striking Nigerian airport workers accused of terrorism**

Striking airport workers at Ibom airport in the southern state of Akwa Ibom, Nigeria have been accused of terrorism by the state governor. A protest by the workers at the airport last Saturday coincided with a power blackout at the airport, causing a plane to be re-routed to Lagos.

The state governor had initially accused the protesting workers of terrorism by causing the blackout but later had to retract his accusation when shown a security report.

## **Kenyan teacher's strikes continue**

Teachers in the Kenya Union of Post Primary Education Teachers vowed to continue their strike. The executive secretary of the union said: "We are not ready to go back to school until the government gives us our dues as agreed in the meeting in 2008."

Teachers in the Kenya National Union of Teachers are also on strike seeking salary and allowance increases.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**