

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

2 August 2013

## Thousands of Romanian railway workers protest in capital

Thousands of railway workers protested in Bucharest last week against plans to privatize the state rail company and better work conditions. Demonstrators gathered outside the transport ministry and marched to the government headquarters.

The government plans to put some workers on a four-day week and sell the debt-saddled freight operator to satisfy demands from the International Monetary Fund.

Last year, 1,100 railway workers were laid off.

The Associated Press cited technician Marius Dumitras, who earns €320 (\$424) a month. "What really upsets us is the privatization, which would mean layoffs, a shortening of the working schedule, worse working conditions," he said.

## Greek public sector workers strike

A 24-hour strike of public sector workers was called by the Adedy trade union federation in the Attica region, which includes the Greek capital of Athens on Thursday to protest mass layoffs.

As part of the stoppage, workers marched to the Finance Ministry in Syntagma Square. A further protest will be held on Friday outside the Administrative Reform Ministry in the capital.

## Dairy farmers from Epirus, Greece storm Dodoni headquarters to demand payment

On July 26 hundreds of dairy farmers from Epirus, north western Greece, protested outside the Dodoni dairy factory to demand payment for milk delivered but not paid for. Some 6,000 farmers from the Epirus area supply Dodoni and had given the company until July 24 to pay the outstanding money.

According to *greekreporter.com*, "Reports said they broke the company's main gate and tried to invade the company's building but were stopped by riot police amid clashes, stone-throwing and tear gas."

The company's CEO declared that April's milk supply will be paid for in August, four months later, and May's in September.

*Keptalkingreece* cited the comments of one protester who said, "We have been unpaid for four months, we cannot feed our families".

Dodoni is Greece's leading producer and exporter of cheese products and was among the first state-owned firms to be privatised as part of the 2010-2015 austerity programme. In October 2012, it was sold to Russian

fund Strategic Initiatives UK LLP and Simos Food Group for 20 million euros.

## UK postal workers in 9th strike of dispute

Around four thousand postal workers in hundreds of UK Crown post offices went on a 24-hour strike Monday against government plans to franchise out 70 high street branches and the possible loss of 800 to 1,500 jobs.

The employees, members of the Communication Workers Union, are calling for a pay rise of 3.5 percent for 2012-2013 and a further rise this financial year. The Post Office has refused, claiming that it is not possible when it is making losses. Instead, it is offering a series of cash payments totalling up to £3,400 before April 2015.

The 373 Crown offices, which are usually the larger ones, represent around 3 percent of the total post office network but deal with a fifth of all customers and handle an estimated 40 percent of financial transactions.

The latest strike is the ninth in the current dispute.

## Workers to vote in strike ballot at UK property maintenance company

Workers at the UK property maintenance company Kier Stoke are to vote on industrial action, following changes to the way they are paid.

There are fears that further changes to wages and conditions may be introduced after Kier took the decision to pay workers on the 28th of the month instead of the 15th.

Kier said the move brought the affected sites into line with the rest of the business.

The company employs around 430 workers and is responsible for the repair and maintenance of 19,000 homes owned by Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

Staff at Kier depots in Gosport, Harlow, Islington, North Tyneside and Southend will also be balloted over the same issue.

## Strike ballot at University of Liverpool

Staff at the University of Liverpool in England began a ballot last week for industrial action, the first ever at the university, over threats to make them sign a new contract or face dismissal. Over half the workforce

(2,803) is affected. The ballot closes September 6.

In June, university management issued dismissal notices to all staff, demanding they work longer hours, without overtime pay, and on weekends and bank holidays without compensation.

In response to a question at an all-staff meeting, the vice-chancellor, Sir Howard Newby confirmed that any member of staff who rejects the new contract will be dismissed.

### **Strike ballot of London Underground workers**

The Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union (RMT) served notice of a strike ballot July 25 following the announcement by Transport for London (TfL) of their intention to introduce Driver Only Operation on the whole London Underground network and eliminate around 130 "safety-critical" guard posts. The strike ballot opened July 31 and will close August 15.

The RMT said, "To underscore the essential role of the guards, last week there was a major incident near Kentish Town which required the emergency evacuation of over 100 passengers in searing heat between stations. That evacuation was led by the guard and even LOROL [London Overground Rail Operations] admitted in their statement: "The prompt actions of London Overground staff enabled the incident to be brought to a close as quickly as possible." The company and TfL are now preparing to sack those very same staff whose actions they were praising just a week ago."

### **Dispute declared in Israeli civil service**

The Histadrut (General Federation of unions in Israel) declared an official dispute in the civil service Sunday evening, over the government's "unilateral decision on civil service reform."

As always, the unions eagerly advertised their willingness to collaborate in any government plans with Histadrut Trade Unions Division chairman Avi Nissenkoren saying, "The labor dispute was declared following the unilateral decision. Civil service reform cannot be carried out unilaterally. We are demanding that the government should avoid unilateral acts, and that any reform should be carried out by agreement, with a view to what is good for the public service and to protecting workers' rights."

### **Turkish municipal workers strike despite union sabotage**

Municipal workers in Izmir, Turkey staged a strike July 26, "but only half of the 7,500 workers who were expected to attend were able to participate due to a last-minute board decision revoking the right to strike of some workers," according to the *Do?an News Agency*. The High Board of Arbitration blocked the decision the night before workers were planning for the strike.

"A group of [Izmir municipality subsidiary] IZELMAN workers protested the union, Genel-??, by walking to the union building, claiming they had been "fooled." They chanted slogans against both the union and the Izmir Mayor Aziz Kocao?lu in front of the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions (D?SK), as union executives were holding an assessment meeting."

?Workers were cited as saying, "The municipality applied to the High Board of Arbitration while negotiating with us at the table. Our right to strike has been blocked and union executives appear to know it."

?Meanwhile, 3,500 workers of another Izmir municipality subsidiary ?ZENERJ? also walked out despite a union executive declaring that a similar Arbitration Board decision was applicable to them.

Africa

### **Ugandan schools hit by strike**

Teachers in secondary schools in the Sheema district of western Uganda are on strike over poor food, bad sanitation, lack of cultural activities and maladministration on the part of school heads. Over 40 schools are affected, 29 of which are private and 13 government aided. Following the strike the Sheema district education officer issued an order for the schools to be closed and pupils sent home.

### **Tanzania road construction workers strike**

Labourers, drivers and office clerks working for the Chinese owned Jianxi Geo-Engineering Group, currently upgrading a 75 kilometre section of the Sumbawanga-Kanazi road, have walked off the job. They are protesting management abuse, calling for their wages to be increased to the 325,000Sh (\$200) a month minimum wage from their current 150,000Sh (\$93) a month and the company's refusal to pay them overtime rate even though they work more than 14 hours a day.

### **Liberian health workers end strike**

The strike by Liberian nurses and health workers which began last week was suspended Wednesday.

The decision follows a meeting between Ministry of Health officials and union leaders which resulted in a memorandum of understanding, which reportedly agreed to increased wages and for an additional 2,000 full time nurses to be employed.

### **Kenyan teachers threaten new strike**

The Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) has issued a seven-day strike notice in response to the government delaying payment of July salaries. Teachers returned to work mid-July after several weeks strike action following an agreement on allowance payments.

KNUT officials say the withholding of salaries is in contravention of the return to work formula agreed between the union and the Teachers Service Commission.

### **Kenyan doctors threaten strike over pay delays**

Doctors belonging to the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU) have threatened to begin a three-day strike from August 5 if their salaries are not paid by August 3.

Doctors had been paid directly by the government, but this has now been devolved to county level. However, the KMPDU has called for this process to be halted until the proper mechanisms are in place to make sure payments are on time.



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