

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East and Africa

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

## Europe

### Bus workers in southern England walkout

The 60 bus drivers employed by Hampshire and Dorset First Bus group in the Weymouth area walked out yesterday in a 24 hour strike, which is to be followed by further action on Monday. They are seeking pay parity with their colleagues working for Yellow Buses in Bournemouth who earn more than £10 (\$16.30) an hour. The Weymouth drivers are on £8.30 (\$13.50) an hour.

The employer has offered a 1.5 percent pay increase for the period of April 2013 to April 2014, which would bring their pay up to £8.50 (\$13.90) but the increase would have to be self-financing. The Weymouth drivers held a 24 hour strike on January 20.

### Irish rail workers to ballot

Employees of Irish Rail are due to begin balloting next week on further attacks to their jobs and conditions. They are members of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU). Irish Rail wants to achieve cost cuts of 8.7 million euro (\$11.8 million), mainly through cuts in pay. Irish Rail has already cut 68 million euro (\$92 million) since the beginning of the recession.

Staff have seen their pay frozen since 2008 as well as cuts in employees and erosion of conditions. The result of the ballot is expected at the end of the month.

### Italy: Electrolux workers strike after threats of huge pay cuts

Last week Electrolux, the Swedish electrical appliances manufacturer, proposed big pay cuts for its nearly 4,000 workers at its four Italian plants. The proposals were met with a walkout by the workers.

Electrolux wants to cut wages by 130 euro (\$176) a month. In addition they are seeking to reduce the working day to six hours a day, cut breaks and reduce production bonuses by 80 percent. Overall, Electrolux are seeking to reduce wage costs from around 1400 euro (\$1,900) a month to 700 euro (\$950) a month.

The company says it faces competition from Chinese manufacturers and

that its Italian employees must face cuts in pay to align them with pay rates in the company's plants in Poland and Hungary.

### March by Italian logistics workers

Around 1,000 workers marched through Bologna last Saturday. They represented logistic workers employed by Granarolo but included other logistic workers employed in other warehouses across Northern Italy.

The Granarolo employees have been protesting and taking intermittent strike action over the last eight months. They are seeking higher wages, improved conditions and the reinstatement of 51 of their colleagues fired for taking part in previous strikes and protests.

Granarolo is a large dairy product manufacturer representing thousands of dairy cooperatives.

### Dutch care workers hold token strike

Care workers employed in 100 nursery and care homes across the country were due to hold a token strike of between one minute and one hour on Tuesday of this week. They are members of the Abvakabo FNV union. They are demanding improved working conditions. Last month care workers at 50 institutions went out on strike.

### Sacked Turkish hospital workers reinstated

Eleven workers employed by a subcontractor providing canteen services at the Cerrahpasa hospital in Istanbul who had been fired have been reinstated and were due to return to work on Tuesday. The reinstatement followed a 22-day sit-in in the hospital garden. The canteen staff had been fired after complaining about poor pay.

## Middle East

### Bahrain protests to demand reinstatement

Around 200 workers protested in front of the Labour Ministry last week, demanding the reinstatement of workers originally dismissed in 2011. The demonstration was organised by the General Federation of Bahrain Trade

Unions. It was the 24th such protest demanding reinstatement.

Nearly 5,000 workers who skipped work to attend anti-government demonstrations back in 2011 were dismissed. Since then, many of the workers have been reinstated but a few hundred have not been.

### **Miners arrested in Iran**

Nearly 30 miners employed by a contractor at the Chadormalu mining company have been arrested. The mine produces iron ore. Back in November, 800 miners staged a one-hour walkout protesting low wages and the dismissal of a union secretary, Hassaninejad, at the mine.

According to reports, following the intervention of the government security bureau in nearby Ardakan, some of the miners' grievances were addressed. However Hassaninejad was not reinstated.

A further three-day strike took place in December. The labour office on January 28 confirmed the dismissal of Hassaninejad leading to further protests and the subsequent arrests now standing at 28.

### **Israeli medical staff strike**

The strike by medical staff at the Hadassah Medical Centre in Jerusalem is continuing. The strike began last week in response to the finance ministry failing to carry through negotiations regarding expansion of the hospital budget. The medical centre has now stopped all admissions except emergency cases. The finance ministry was due to have meetings with union representatives Wednesday of this week in an attempt to resolve the dispute.

### **Kuwaiti oil workers threaten strike**

Union leaders representing around 19,000 oil workers in Kuwait are to set a date for strike action in the next week. This follows a decision made by the Gulf Cooperation Council to cut their wages.

According to the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation the cuts were necessary after bonus payments to the oil workers took their salaries above the maximum allowed by law. Talks between the union and the oil minister on Monday failed to resolve the dispute.

#### **Africa**

### **South African platinum miners' strike continues**

The official strike at the South African platinum mining companies Implats, Amplats and Lonmin continued into its second week. The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) 80,000 members are striking for a basic wage of R12500 (\$1125) a month.

Negotiations continued after the weekend, with a new offer of 9 percent being rejected by the membership. Police used stun grenades and rubber bullets against 3000 striking miners at Amplats Khuseleka shaft near Rustenberg arresting two and injuring one.

At Implats, only 1 percent of the workforce turned up for work and at

Lonmin 0.8 percent on Tuesday.

Lonmin reported a 45 percent increase in refined production year-on-year in the last three months of 2013, with sales for the quarter up by 24 percent.

### **South African metal refiners' strike**

Members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, (NUMSA) walked out at Anglo American Platinum, Amplats, refineries and smelters plant on Monday in pursuit of a pay increase. Amplats is affected by an ongoing strike with the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union demanding a doubling of the basic wage.

NUMSA is withdrawing up to 2,000 of its members in pursuit of a doubling of the wages of the worst paid to R2,500 (\$225) and a more than 9 percent increase for other metalworkers. Their demands also include improved accommodation and transport, double pay on holidays and the ceasing of body searches at the end of shifts.

### **Nambian port workers action declared illegal**

Around 100 port workers went on strike at Walvis Bay, Namibia last Thursday. Namport, the container handling company, was brought to a standstill. The unofficial strike has been declared illegal and the port workers were given suspension notices and warned that if they continued their action the suspensions will be implemented.

The workers are responsible for loading and offloading containers and their strike is result of an apparent demarcation dispute between the dockers and truck drivers following recent privatisation of the dock facilities.

A similar strike took place last September. The dockers' union operating at the dock the, Namibian Trade and Allied Workers Union, was not available for comment.

### **Kenyan medical staff oppose salary discrepancies**

Kenyan nurses have issued a seven-day strike notice in response to an assault on their wages and allowances. The nurses, members of the Kenyan National Union of Nurses (KNUN), have been angered that many of them not received their January wages, whilst those who have received their wage slips had not been in full. The nurses say they will not be turning up for work on Monday of next week if the government does not reverse the decision to cut their pay by Friday.

Kenyan doctors have come under the same attack on wages and allowances as the nurses. They have also threatened strike action but not specified a date.

The assault on both doctors and nurses pay is the result of the decision to devolve responsibility for the financing and administration of the health system to local counties away from central government which has been underway since last year.

The Kenyan Medical and Pharmacist and Dentist Union, Kenyan National Union of Nurses and the Kenyan Health Professionals Society, at the time, accepted the devolution but argued it was done in a hurry without following the law.

## Strike by South Sudan medical staff

Doctors have gone on strike at Nyala Teaching hospital in South Darfur, Sudan. The doctors have demanded the government provide more protection from attack by government militia men and a drastic improvement of their working environment.

Radio Dabanga said all the doctors in the hospital have stopped working in the emergency department. According to a report the constant attacks by militia men on Nyala doctors has caused some of the doctors to resign.



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