

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

28 February 2014

## Train drivers in Leeds and Newcastle, England strike for 48 hours

Maintenance train drivers at depots in Leeds and Newcastle in the north of England began a 48-hour strike Wednesday. Following the strike, the workers, who are employed by the Northern Rail Company, are to impose an overtime ban.

The drivers are seeking a pay re-grading in line with the complex and demanding role they carry out.

## University cleaning and maintenance staff in London vote to strike

Workers employed by the ISS group, which provides cleaning and maintenance services to the London University School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), have voted unanimously to strike March 4 and 5.

They are seeking parity of sick pay, leave and pensions with those workers employed directly by SOAS. ISS have so far refused to improve their pay and conditions. The UNISON union has urged ISS to return to talks to settle the dispute. The ISS staff have received support from SOAS-employed staff and students in their dispute.

## Halifax town hall staff demonstrate

Council workers at Halifax in the north of England held a demonstration on Tuesday while the Conservative/Liberal Democrat-controlled council discussed the annual budget. The workers were opposing proposals in the budget to “review” paid time off for lay union officials. They also protested plans to divert money from neighbourhood support teams covering more deprived areas to average it out across the whole district.

## Croatian workers in solidarity strike

Over a quarter-million workers employed in the public and private sectors held a two-hour solidarity strike Tuesday, beginning 12 noon. Strikers included railway staff, bringing all trains operating within Croatia to a standstill. Cross-border trains continued to run. Teachers and bus drivers were also involved in the action.

The solidarity strike called by the SSSH union federation was in support of workers at the Arena knitwear factory and the Lipik medical rehabilitation centre who have gone unpaid for several months.

## Croatian workers mount demonstration outside parliament

Around 1,000 workers, organised in five trade union federations, held a demonstration outside parliament in Zagreb on Wednesday. They were protesting against government plans to amend the Labour Act.

The amendments will lower wages, increase working hours, shorten notice of termination of employment, restrict the right to strike, marginalise trade union involvement and encourage agency employment, and hence, increase job insecurity.

## Cyprus port workers dispute

Port workers across Cyprus ended their overtime ban Tuesday, following an agreement with finance ministry officials to meet to discuss their grievances. They took the action following cuts in overtime rates imposed by the government as part of its austerity drive.

On Wednesday port employees at Limassol announced they would hold a 24-hour strike the following day to oppose the cuts to overtime rates.

## Cypriot power workers' strike

Power workers employed by the Electricity Authority (EAC) went on strike Tuesday and Wednesday this week, from 7:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., leading to power cuts across the island. The action is in response to plans to privatise the power company.

## Georgian miners continue strike

Georgian miners are continuing their strike which began on February 14. The miners are employed by RMG Copper and RMG Gold in Kazreti and are demanding a pay increase and the reinstatement of 184 men.

## Greek dockers' strike

Greek dockers held a 24-hour nationwide strike on Wednesday opposing government plans to sell a stake in the Piraeus Port Authority, part of the

privatisation measures imposed in response to the government bail out by the European Union-led troika.

Hundreds of port employees held a rally in central Athens and then marched to parliament where the proposal was being discussed.

### **Frankfurt airport security staff strike**

Security staff at Frankfurt airport in Germany held a 24-hour strike last Friday in pursuit of a pay increase. They are members of the Verdi trade union. Their action at Europe's third largest airport hub led to passenger delays as 35 Lufthansa flights were cancelled.

### **Egyptian workers seek minimum wage payment**

Public Transport Authority workers in Egypt began a strike Sunday demanding minimum pay rates in line with Metro workers. By Monday, more than 25 garages were involved in the action. Postal Authority staff also came out on strike Sunday, seeking to be covered by the minimum income plan as well as demanding a seven percent bonus payment.

On Wednesday, a spokesman for the finance ministry said the postal and transport workers were not eligible to be covered by the minimum income plan.

### **Liberian health workers continue strike**

A strike by Liberian health workers has entered its second week, causing major hospitals to stop admitting patients. The president of the Health Workers Union, Joseph Tamba, said the government had not given allowances and benefits to health workers already given to civil servants. In 2010 teachers, civil servants and security guards received increases, but 80 percent of nurses missed out. Around 40 percent of health workers in the state health system work as agency staff.

### **Namibian finance workers' strike**

Employees at Mutual & Federal, one of the oldest short-term insurance companies in Southern Africa, began a nationwide strike this week. They are members of the Namibia Financial Institutions Union (NAFINU). It is the first strike action against the company since 1831.

Ninety percent of the employees of Mutual & Federal, part of the Old Mutual group of companies, took strike action demanding a 9 percent wage increase, a 50 percent company contribution to medical aid and a housing allowance.

### **Nigerian college lecturers strike**

The Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) is to

continue its strike after negotiations with the Nigerian government became deadlocked on February 20. Chairman of COEASU, Olayanju Abolaji, said the government "must meet most of our demands before we can call off the strike."

They began their indefinite strike December 31, to protest against infrastructure decay at their colleges, poor conditions of service, and to demand an increase in college funding. Other issues are the non-implementation of the 2010 COEASU agreement and the illegal implementation of the Integrated Personnel and Payroll System.

Polytechnic lecturers have been on strike for three months over similar issues.

### **Kenyan retail staff set to strike**

Workers at Tuskys supermarket chain in Kenya, were preparing to go out on strike again in response to the sacking of over 100 employees. Tuskys said the staff had been made redundant. The retailer employs 7,000 workers in Kenya and has embarked on a massive expansion program establishing new stores.

The supermarket staff throughout the 50 Kenyan branches came out just before Christmas for a wage increase and to oppose the destruction of overtime payments. Employees claim the average day is 15 hours.

Tuskys supermarkets has the largest number of outlets of any chain in Kenya.

### **Nigerian hospital staff strike**

Hospital staff at Imo Specialist Hospital, Owerri, Nigeria went on strike Monday, demanding payment of eight months of unpaid salaries. Hospital workers locked the main gates and stopped all traffic from entering the hospital grounds.

Workers speaking anonymously suggested the doctors should evacuate all patients as they would not continue slaving for the state government. Workers' placards read, "Pay us. We've worked for it. Remember we have dependents. Eight months is not eight weeks."

Workers were last paid in December, when they received their April to May salaries.



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