

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East and Africa

7 March 2014

Greek teachers and school workers demonstrate against planned job losses

Greek teachers, cleaning staff and school wardens clashed with riot police on Feb 28, when they demonstrated outside the Ministry of Administrative Reform in Athens. When demonstrators attempted to enter the building, police used tear gas to disperse them. Seventeen were arrested—16 teachers and one warden. Among those detained was Themis Kotsifakis, president of the teachers' union OLME.

The demonstration was called in opposition to the government's "labour mobility" programme. Under the programme, the government planned to suspend the jobs of 25,000 public-sector workers by the end of 2013 and to fire 15,000 by the end of 2014 as part of its austerity plans.

Greek port workers strike against privatisation

Greek dockers held a 24-hour strike February 26 in opposition to proposals to sell off a share in the Piraeus Port Authority to private investors. Piraeus is Greece's largest port.

The strike coincided with a discussion held in parliament on the privatisation of the port. The privatisation of state assets is part of the austerity programme being forced on Greece by the European Union-led "troika".

Cypriot workers protest privatisation

Unions representing workers in the state electricity supply industry, the state-owned telecoms company CyTA and port workers held short strikes of between one hour and three hours on Tuesday.

The strikes coincided with a privatisation bill for their industries being discussed in parliament the same day. The port workers also held demonstrations at the entrances of Limassol and Larnaca.

Bus drivers in Cyprus suspend planned strike

Bus drivers in the major Cypriot city of Limassol suspended a planned 48-hour strike due to begin Wednesday.

Their company EMEL has promised them they will be paid salary arrears for February. Workers said if they do not receive the full amount

owed they will begin an indefinite strike Friday.

Care staff strike in Doncaster, England

Care workers in Doncaster in South Yorkshire began a one-week strike last week. Staff voted overwhelmingly for the action when Care UK proposed cutting pay for evening and weekend work, as well as slashing sick pay and holiday entitlement. The proposal will cut thousands of pounds a year from each worker's salary.

They ended the strike on Wednesday this week, with a rally held at Doncaster Trades Club. The dispute remains unresolved.

Cleaning workers' strike Merseyrail, Liverpool, England

Staff employed by Lorne Stewart in Liverpool went on strike Monday in pursuit of a pay claim. They are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union (RMT). Lorne Stewart is a contractor for Merseyrail, responsible for repairing and maintaining the rail track.

It was the second strike in a nine month dispute, with the workers seeking a substantive pay increase and the company only offering a below inflation increase. The strikers held a rally outside Merseyrail headquarters Monday morning.

Cleaning staff at London university hold second strike

Cleaners employed by ISS Facility Services and working in the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), part of the University of London, began a second two-day strike on Wednesday.

The 50 employees are seeking parity of conditions with staff employed directly by SOAS. This includes 30 days annual leave, contractual sick pay and membership in a defined pension scheme.

The UNISON trade union is calling on ISS to return to the negotiating table and is urging SOAS to intervene.

Georgian miners strike continues

Miners working for RMG Gold and RMG Copper in the Georgian town

of Kazreti began a strike February 14.

They are demanding a salary increase, improved working and safety conditions and the reinstatement of 184 miners sacked in January as a result of a reorganisation of the company. They are members of the Trade Union of Metallurgy, Mining and Chemical Industry Workers of Georgia.

The strikers have been supported by inhabitants of Kazreti, with doctors, teachers and children taking part in street demonstrations in support of the miners.

The last round of discussion took place February 26, with the company agreeing to reinstate 40 of the dismissed miners. This was rejected by the miners who vowed to continue their action until their demands are met in full.

Irish airline workers unions to cooperate with pension panel

The Services Industrial, Professional and Technical union (SIPTU), which represents staff working at the three main Irish airports, Dublin, Cork and Shannon airport, together with staff working for the airline Aer Lingus, has agreed to fully cooperate with the panel appointed by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport looking into their pension shortfall.

The pension fund is facing a 780 million euro deficit. The union is keen to negotiate a deal which can only be to the detriment of the workers.

Planned 24 hour strikes by Aer Lingus and Dublin Airport staff set for March 14 are still due to go ahead. Aer Lingus has also said it will withhold productivity payments, averaging around 1,300 euros until the pension dispute is settled.

Romanian mining company lays off 400 workers

The Rosia Montana Gold Corporation (RMGC) has laid off nearly 400 Romanian workers, as plans for a gold and silver mine at Rosia Montana have been put on hold. The Canadian company Gabriel Resources has a majority holding in RMGC.

Russian auto supplier strike

Last Friday, 50 workers employed at a factory making auto supplies in the Russian city of Samara went on strike over wage arrears. They say they have not been paid for two months. They are members of the Interregional Union of Workers Association.

Egyptian bus drivers end strike

Public bus drivers in Greater Cairo ended their strike March 1 after five days. Among their demands was to receive minimum pay rates in line with Metro workers.

The head of the Public Transport Authority said their pay and conditions would be in line with other public sector workers.

Egyptian textile union leader proposes halt to strike

Abdel Fattah Ibrahim, the head of the Textile Workers Union met with newly appointed Minister of Manpower Nahed Al-Ashry on March 2 and pledged to halt the strike by textile workers.

The suspension of the strike is for two months while negotiations take place. The strike involving thousands of textile operatives was for a minimum wage and the payment of outstanding bonuses.

Israeli foreign ministry staff strike

Employees working for the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs struck this week, protesting low wages and poor working conditions. Their action will stop all services provided to foreign dignitaries visiting the country as well as services to Israeli dignitaries planning to go abroad. Israeli consular services will also be affected.

The strike is a resumption of the one that took place last summer which had been suspended following talks with the Finance Ministry. Those talks have now broken down.

Turkish workers occupy plant

A group of workers employed by the Delaware-based industrial packaging company Greif Inc. in Turkey are continuing an occupation of a plant which makes polywoven shipping packs. The workers are accompanied by supporters, who state their protest is "on a broad social agenda."

Bizjournals.com reported that Greif said that one of the firms' plants had been occupied since February 10. The company called it an "illegal labour action".

Greif CEO David Fischer said, "We are leveraging our global production and supply-chain capabilities outside of Turkey to mitigate the impact of this disruption."

Greif issued a company statement revealing that it is considering restructuring cuts of \$25 million, with Fischer warning that "one of our plants in Turkey" might be closed in retaliation for the strike.

South African platinum miners strike continues

The strike by South African platinum miners continues into its seventh week. The Association of Mining and Construction Union (AMCU) is said to have put forward a revised deal to the three platinum mining companies. The new deal differs from a Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) deal, rejected over two weeks ago by the mining companies in that the union is offering to break the link between pay and some benefits.

The platinum companies have rejected a new union proposal of a R12,500 (\$1,170) basic wage achieved over a period of three years

The AMCU union is under threat of legal action by the companies who accuse it of breaking picket line agreements. The union denies this. AMCU accuses the platinum companies of infiltrating picket lines and character assassination.

A new union has been set up by ex-National Union of Mineworkers members, the Workers' Association Union (WAU), with the sole purpose of getting the miners back to work. The WAU was launched Saturday.

Gabon customs workers escalate strike

Customs workers in Gabon, on strike since February, stepped up their action Tuesday to force the government to negotiate. They are represented by the Custom Workers Union of Gabon (MISDG).

They have disrupted the flow of goods in and out of the country, but had previously exempted fresh produce, pharmaceuticals, military equipment and goods going to the presidency. Under the escalation they may disrupt the flow of previously exempted goods.

Nigerian health workers strike

Health workers in the Nigerian state of Kaduna came out on strike again March 1, demanding the full implementation of the Consolidated Health Salary Structure. The indefinite strike is an attempt to force the state government to pay the 30 percent shortfall still outstanding.

Joint Health Sector Unions (JOHESU) Chairperson Cecilia Musa said that nurses worked under stressful conditions, attending to 30 patients daily, whereas the World Health Organization standard was one nurse per six patients.

Hospitals across the state were empty, with no nurses to attend and patients were asked to leave the hospitals.

Strike by Nigerian state public-sector staff

Nigerian public sector workers in Edo State resumed their strike on March 3, after their demands were ignored. The Edo State chapter of the Nigerian Labour Congress resumed their action to press for the release of four years of unpaid promotion arrears among other outstanding issues.

The public sector workers struck in December for four days, but attempts to get a meeting with the State Governor failed. Nigerian Labour Congress Chairperson Emmanuel Ademokun said, "This time around, we will not listen to any person. People who would want to prevail on us not to go on strike should first prevail on the governor to meet our demands."

Nigerian teachers continue long-running strike

Nigerian teachers in Benue State are continuing their five-month strike for the minimum wage. The chairman of the primary school teachers' union, KNUT, Godwin Anya, said the government has abandoned a recent committee created to find resolutions to the situation. He said the strike would continue until the government implements the minimum wage.





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