

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

21 March 2014

## Europe

### Nationwide 24-hour strike in France

French unions held a 24-hour strike on Tuesday in support of a wage increase and to protest President Francois Hollande's proposals to cut billions of euros from company payrolls.

The strike hit public transport, schools and French airports. Under Hollande's "Responsibility Pact" 50 billion euros (\$69 billion) will be cut from health care, local government and family subsidies upon which millions of workers rely.

Demonstrations and protests took place in 140 towns and cities across France, with the largest in Paris.

### German public-sector walk-out

Public-sector workers, members of the Verdi union held a nationwide strike on Wednesday. The strike hit transport, children's nurseries and rubbish collection. They are seeking a 3.5 percent pay increase and a one-off 100 euro (\$138) payment.

### Greek public-sector workers strike for two days

Public-sector employees in Greece, including doctors and nurses, began a 48-hour strike Wednesday. They are protesting government plans to fire public-sector staff who had been placed on job mobility schemes but who have not been able to move on to other employment. A demonstration was held in central Athens attended by 3,000 workers.

Government offices and schools were closed while hospitals provided an emergency-only skeleton service. The government's plans to get rid of 11,000 jobs in the public sector in the course of this year as part of the European Union-led "troika" plans to impose billions in spending cuts.

Greek adult unemployment is already more than 25 percent.

### Greek teachers walk out

The Greek Union of Secondary School Teachers (OLME) held strikes on Thursday and Friday this week. Another is scheduled for March 25. They are protesting job losses.

Since July more than 1,845 Information Technology teachers have been moved into the "mobility scheme" where

they receive reduced wages. The scheme is due to end March 22 after which around 1,260 will be transferred to other posts, around 380 will be rehired but over 200 will lose their jobs.

OLME met Prime Minister Antonis Samaras on Monday to discuss the dismissal of the workers. According to *Kathemerini* OLME are campaigning regarding the case of the 204 workers who face the sack. They are not opposing the forcible transfer of the 1,260 workers.

The previous Thursday, Education Minister Constantinos Arvanitopoulos met a delegation of teachers, before leaving the ministry to attend a parliamentary vote. *Kathemerini* reported a "group of about 30 teachers refused to vacate the premises and were subsequently forced to leave following police intervention."

### Bulgarian irrigation workers hold demonstrations

Staff employed by the Irrigation Systems Company held a series of demonstrations across Bulgaria to protest wages arrears. Their salaries have not been paid for four months.

Protests have been held in various towns and cities across the country beginning in Blagoevgrad last week. On Wednesday, over 100 employees staged a rally in Pazardzhik, which was addressed by an official from the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Agriculture. Some are on hunger strike to protest the non-payment of wages.

Irrigation Systems has a huge debt and Bulgarian power companies that have not been paid have threatened to cut off power supplies, which could result in severe flooding.

### Workers strike at Croatian diesel factory

More than 200 workers employed at the Adriadiesel factory in Karlovac have been on strike for over a week. Adriadiesel manufactures diesel engines and spare parts. They are protesting two months arrears of wages.

### Turkish health workers protest

Doctors and other health workers held a nationwide one-day strike March 14. Protests took place in towns and cities, including Istanbul. They raised several demands including a pay increase, an end to performance-related pay schemes and a halt to moves towards privatisation.

## Middle East

### **Egyptian doctors continue action**

The partial strike by Egyptian doctors will continue in spite of calls by the government to suspend the strike. Doctors, who have been joined by dentists and pharmacists, have been on strike for over a week.

The doctors are not attending outpatient clinics, but are providing emergency services. Their main demands are for an increase in hospital security and for more resources to be provided for health care.

### **Egyptian transport staff suspend strike**

Tram and bus workers who have been on strike in Alexandria over a demand for increased allowances have suspended their action. They did so after the government said it would restore an end of service indemnity of two months for each year of service when they retire and pay a monthly bonus to current workers.

### **Protest by steelworkers in Iran**

Employees at the Zagros steel company in Kurdistan protested in front of the Ministry of Labour buildings on Monday to demand their eight months of wages arrears. The company closed down last July and all the workers were laid off.

## Africa

### **Ghanaian telecom strike**

Workers at Ericsson's Internet service provider in Ghana have gone on indefinite strike for better wages and conditions. The divisional chairman of the telecommunications workers union, Ernest Koyo Apaku, told press that management had shown bad faith during negotiations leaving them no option but to strike.

Negotiations began in April of last year and more than 16 meetings have taken place. The telecommunications union divisional chairman said they are not being paid the going rate for the job and the basic wage should be increased by 25 percent, which would include transportation and accommodation allowances.

### **Protest at Nigerian transport company**

Nigerian workers at the state-owned transport company ITC Ltd, in Imo state, protested at the non-payment of seven months wages and allowances. They locked the gates of the

company barring anyone from entry.

A representative for the ITC workers, Chukwuemeka Okafor, said although attempts have been made to notify the government officially they have had no positive response. If the government do not address the issue, he said, they will not return to work.

### **Sit-in at Sudan airport**

Security staff at Khartoum International Airport staged an eight-hour sit-in last Saturday to protest an outside company being brought in to do their jobs. The action affected scheduled flights. The airport management hired Al-Hadaf Company to take over security at airport gates while original staff disabled safety devices and withdrew. Witnesses said conflicts broke out between old and new staff. The workers man baggage security screens, impose safety regulations and secure the aircraft before take-off.

### **Kenyan universities strike continues**

Currently strikes are taking place at universities across the country in protest at the Sh3.9 billion (\$45m) paid out to universities but not passed on to staff as part of a national collective bargaining deal.

This week at Moi University, Edoret, lecturers turned off the water supply and Internet services to the campus, paralysing most of the activity at the campus. Students are angry because they have paid their fees and the government have released the money to pay the lecturers, but accuse the vice chancellors of spending it on other items. The Domestic Hotels and Allied Workers Union along with the University Academic Staff Union and the Kenyan University staff Union came out two weeks ago.

Students at Egerton University had threatened to join the strike after the negotiations collapsed, but the campus was closed. The reason given for the university closure was bad sanitation after the University Staff Union joined the lecturers strike. The chairman of the student union at the university said, "before the students were sent home, the situation was slowly degenerating into full-blown crisis."

### **Oil workers in Chad return to work**

Oil workers employed by the China National Petroleum Corporation and the China National Logging Corporation which supplies services to the oil industry returned to work on Monday after more than a week on strike. According to their union, the Chinese companies had agreed to a 20 percent pay increase and improved conditions.



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