

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

28 March 2014

Europe

## Renewed public sector strikes in Germany

Thousands of public sector workers in Germany have taken further strike action. The employees, members of the Verdi union, held a one-day nationwide strike last week. They are seeking a 3.5 percent pay increase. Those taking part include rubbish collectors, bus drivers, teachers and nurses.

Monday saw strikes in Brandenburg, whilst on Tuesday there were strikes in the Rhineland area; other parts of the country were due to take action later in the week. Further negotiations are due to take place on March 31 in Potsdam.

## German airport workers walkout

Airport staff covering freight handling, maintenance, administration and security were due to strike Thursday. They are seeking a 3.5 percent pay increase and a one-off €100 (\$138) payment. They are represented by the Verdi union. Airports affected will include Frankfurt, Munich, Hamburg and Stuttgart.

## Ambulance staff in UK Yorkshire region hold further protest

Ambulance staff employed by the Yorkshire Ambulance Service (YAS) and members of the Unite union, held a five-hour strike on Monday with another planned for Saturday, March 31.

They have held several such short duration strikes this year. They are protesting YAS plans to introduce longer shift patterns with no meal breaks. Ambulance staff say this would compromise patient safety. Unite represents only a minority of ambulance staff employed by YAS, the major union being Unison. YAS does not recognise Unite.

## Care workers in Doncaster, England hold second seven-day action

Around 100 people working for Care UK in Doncaster returned to work Wednesday after staging a second seven-day strike. Care UK has a contract with Doncaster council to provide care to people with learning disabilities in the area. They are members of the Unison union. Care UK want to implement changes to evening and weekend pay rates that the workers say will cut their wages by up to a half.

Care UK employees have vowed to fight on with a third seven-day strike planned in April.

## London University cleaning staff hold third walk-out

Cleaners employed by ISS Facility Services, which provides cleaning and janitor services to the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), part of the University of London, held a one-day strike last Friday. This is the third day of action since the beginning of the year.

The staff members of the union Unison are seeking parity of conditions, pension rights and sick pay in line with staff carrying out similar roles but employed directly by SOAS.

## Miners in Georgia end protest

Miners employed by RMG Gold and RMG Copper in the Kazreti region returned to work on Monday after mediation by the Georgian government. RMG planned to immediately reinstate 80 workers who had been laid off in January. RMG say they will reinstate a further 100 workers who had previously been laid off when its financial position improves.

## Greek seamen vow action against owners owing pay

The PanHellenic Seamen's Union (PNO) agreed, beginning Thursday, to immobilize the ships where the owner owes its employees back pay. PNO also announced it will support a 24-hour strike called by the General Confederation of Greek Workers for April 9.

## **Bulgarian tobacco growers threaten blockade of parliament**

Bulgarian tobacco growers have threatened a protest and blockade of parliament if the Bulgarian government does not agree to bigger subsidies. The growers say they are not being offered fair prices for their crops by multinational companies. In January they set up roadblocks on main roads to press their case.

Middle East

## **Egyptian postal workers strike**

On Tuesday five leaders of a strike by Postal Authority workers in Alexandria were arrested in early morning police raids on their homes. Ismail Gabr, Haitham Uthman, Ayman Hanafi, Hani Said and Hisham Abd-al-Hamid were arrested at 1 a.m. Their colleagues organised a mass march and demonstration in front of the main post office in Alexandria to demand their release.

The strike began in the Suez area on Sunday and was quickly followed by walkouts in other areas, including Port Said and Alexandria. According to Zinab Ali, secretary general of the Independent Union of Postal Authority Workers, 70 percent of employees, around 35,000, were supporting the action. They are seeking an immediate 50 percent pay increase followed by regular periodic pay rises of a minimum of 7 percent. They are also calling for head of the Postal Authority and his aides to be sacked.

The arrests came less than 24 hours after a kangaroo court handed out a mass death sentence to 529 supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in what marks a new stage in the military junta's brutal efforts to terrorise and intimidate popular opposition.

## **Israeli foreign ministry workers intensify action**

Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff began industrial action on March 5 protesting low wages and poor working conditions. Initially their action stopped provision of services to foreign dignitaries visiting the country. The planned visit by the Pope in May is said to be under threat as a result of the action. They also withdrew services to Israeli dignitaries planning to go abroad and curtailed consular services.

Their action was intensified on Sunday when they began a full-scale strike within Israel and at diplomatic missions abroad. On Tuesday, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who had been locked out of his own office at the Foreign Ministry, threatened to seek a court order to force them back to work.

## **Jordanian oil workers set to walk out**

Nearly 4,000 oil workers announced they would begin an indefinite strike this week. This follows attempts by the General Union of

Petroleum & Chemical Workers to get the Jordanian government to respond to their demands.

Two years ago the union signed a collective agreement with management to increase pay and improve work conditions. However management failed to keep to the terms of the agreement and have refused to negotiate the union's grievances. This led to the decision by the entire workforce to strike.

Africa

## **Action by power workers in Namibia enters second week**

The strike by Namibian power workers at Southern Electricity Company Ltd (SELCo) has entered its second week. They are demanding a 14 percent wage increase; SELCo has offered 7 percent. The 28 striking power workers, represented by the Mine Workers of Namibia, say they are underpaid for the job. They are also demanding transport and medical allowances. SELCo, the electricity supplier for the city of Keetmanshoop in southern Namibia, refuses to negotiate whilst the strike continues.

## **South African platinum miners strike enters eighth week**

The strike at South African platinum mining companies, Amplats, Impala and Lonmin by members of the mineworkers union Associated Miners and Construction Union (AMCU) has entered its eighth week. The latest move by AMCU is for their demand of R12,500 (\$1,168) a month basic wage to be achieved over four years rather than the original demand that it be paid immediately. Jimmy Gama, AMCU national treasurer, said there had been no developments and the strike would continue.

AMCU led a demonstration to Amplats HQ to deliver a memorandum, with plans to lead demonstrations to the headquarters of Lonmin and Impala.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) has reached a separate settlement on March 20 with Amplats, with an agreed pay increase of 8.5 percent for some employees.

Amplats chief executive Chris Griffith welcomed NUMSA's acceptance. "We are delighted that NUMSA has accepted our offer and realises that we have provided a fair and reasonable offer to our employees within our financial constraints," he said.



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