

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

15 August 2014

## Norwegian teachers step up campaign

The Education Association stepped up its action on Monday, when 5,500 teachers from over 130 middle and high schools came out on strike.

The first round of strikes was on July 1 when 33 teachers at a school in Bergen came out. Three smaller unions also joined in the strike. The teachers are seeking a more flexible school day, less micromanagement and to strengthen the role of teachers.

## Twenty-four hour walk out by Portuguese pilots

Pilots working for the Portuguese national airline, TAP, held a 24-hour strike last Saturday which led to the cancellation of dozens of flights. It was to protest TAP's failure to honour a promise to increase overtime pay of pilots and against a deterioration of working conditions.

## Strike of Cypriot bus drivers cut short

Staff employed by Zinonas in the southern coastal city of Larnaca were to hold a 24-hour strike last Thursday to protest the non-payment of July's wages by the company. However, the strike was called off after seven hours when the company agreed to pay their wages in full.

## UK power workers win increased bonus

Around 2,000 staff employed as meter readers, in London, the south east and south west of England for the power company EDF won an increased bonus following three days of strike action. They are members of the Unite union. EDF is one of the largest power supply companies in the UK and provides a fifth of its supply.

The company which made a profit of £800m (\$1.3bn) last year, gave the employees a bonus of £480 (\$800) each in settlement of the strike.

## UK fire-fighters take action over pensions

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU), representing fire-fighters in England

and Wales, began a series of partial strikes last Saturday. It will hold a two-hour strike from noon each day followed by a one hour strike at 11 pm.

The action, which will continue until August 16, is to protest the government's plans to raise the retirement age to 60 from 55 years of age and to increase their pension contributions. Fire fighters fear that many older employees may fail the fitness tests necessary to remain on active duty and so have to leave the service early thus losing out on some of their pension entitlement.

The government's Fire Minister, Penny Mordaunt, cancelled the planned talks between her and FBU representatives just prior to the latest round of action. The dispute began in autumn of last year with various forms of days and partial days of strike along with other forms of action.

## UK meat inspectors vote for strike

Around 500 meat hygiene inspectors and vets employed by the government body, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) have voted by a nearly two-thirds majority to reject an imposed pay increase of 0.75 percent and to strike for an above inflation pay rise. Under the coalition government's pay policy, they have lost around 15 percent of their spending power from their wages.

The operatives are members of the union UNISON. As yet no date has been set for the strike to begin. If it goes ahead it would affect the slaughter of animals and production of meat in around 130 slaughter houses which would affect the supply of meat to supermarkets.

## Museum staff in Wales to walk-out

Staff at the six National Museum of Wales sites have voted to strike every Saturday and Sunday afternoon throughout the summer. They are seeking a pay increase and are protesting cuts to their pensions.

Members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union, they took their first action Saturday August 9. The union says their members have lost around 15 percent in real terms from their wages over the last four years.

## Workers at Kimberly Clark plant in Turkey return to work

Over 200 staff employed by the paper and sanitary manufacturer Kimberly Clark at their plant in Gebze returned to work at the end of last

week after a six week strike. Gebze is 50 kilometres from Istanbul in the province of Kocaeli.

They returned after management agreed to a pay rise, extension of notices of termination of employment and the re-instatement of five workers dismissed in the course of the dispute. They are members of Tumka-Is, the All Paper & Cellulose Industry Workers' Union.

### **Iranian sugar workers protest**

Around 500 employees, half the workforce of the state-owned Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Company that operates Iran's only combined sugar plantation and production facility in Southern Iran, held a protest last Saturday. They were demonstrating against the non-payment of back wages. Those taking part were from various sections of the company, including engineers, accountants, maintenance and administration staff.

### **Lebanese power workers protest shuts down company**

Around 2,000 contract workers employed by the Electricite du Liban (EDL) in Lebanon came out on strike on Monday. They are protesting the company's decision to make just under half of them permanent employees leaving the remainder as contract workers. They are due to take a Civil Service Council exam out of which EDL gives the 891 with the best marks a permanent position.

The protest has seen staff in Beirut protest outside EDL headquarters, burn tyres and block highways. In Nabatieh, they surrounded the EDL facility denying access to EDL employees. They also burned tyres and blockaded roads. In Sidon and Tyre, EDL facilities were also shut down through their action.

On Tuesday EDL strikers demonstrated outside the Ministry of Water and Energy. The Energy Minister, Arthur Nazarian, refused to talk to the protesters.

### **Appeal set up for journalists in Gaza**

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) to which the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate is affiliated has set up an appeal for journalists working in Gaza. Its president, Jim Boumelha, stated: "The recent Israeli military offensive has left total devastation in its wake...13 journalists (have been) killed, the houses and lives of many journalists and their families have been either destroyed or badly damaged."

The IFJ estimates 42 journalists and their families have been displaced and need emergency accommodation, 25 have been injured and are in need of medical treatment. Throughout the Israeli bombardment 10 media facilities were damaged.

### **Kenyan health workers protest**

Nurses at the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Hospital, Kenya went on strike August 11 over non-payment of their July salaries. The staff at the

teaching and referral hospital said they would not return to duty until they are paid their salaries. The strike paralyzed operations and patients went unattended. The Kenyan National Association of Nurses said that salary delays had been discussed but has not been resolved.

Health workers also gave a seven day strike notice over delays of their wages and lack of basic hospital supplies at Kenya's Coast General Hospital. Around 30 interns have already been on strike for a week at the same hospital and are continuing their strike into a second week.

Members of the National Nurses Association of Kenya and the Kenyan Health Professionals on Monday August 11 said they would strike if their salaries for July were not paid. The National Nurses Association of Kenya President painted a grim picture saying "Kenyans are dying... Services have ground to a halt." The CGH is short of 300 nurses after more than 100 resigned over "frustration by the government".

### **Striking Namibian garage workers sacked**

Over 300 garage petrol attendants have been sacked across Namibia for going out on strike last month. The general secretary of the Namibian Fuel and Allied Workers Union (NAFAWU) holds the Ministry of Labour responsible for the mass sackings, after it declared the strike illegal on July 24.

Fuel station workers across the country were sacked after NAFAWU had reached the stage of negotiations with the Association of Service Stations Owners (ASSO) and the dispute had gone on for months. The union says the Ministry of Labour broke the law by arbitrary calling the strike illegal without a court order from the appropriate tribunal.

The unions informed ASSO of the need for a minimum wage four years ago. But ASSO claimed they were not an employers association and are not a body to negotiate with. The charge of illegal strike is because there was no employers' body to declare a strike to. The union has threatened to call out the garage workers and sympathizers in a general strike if the 300 workers are not reinstated.

### **Walk out by bank employees in Sudan**

Bank workers in Khartoum, employed by the Export Development Bank went on indefinite strike on Monday to protest against inadequate salaries and non-payment of financial benefits. The union branch secretary at the Export Bank said that the whole workforce had come out. The union is demanding an increase in their salary in line with other banks and an improvement of career opportunities and payment of all dues.

### **Nigerian health workers in Bayelsa state seek parity**

Joint Health Sector Unions (JOHESU) went on strike in Bayelsa State Nigeria at the Yenagoa Federal Medical Centre to press home their demand for parity with health staff in other states.

The strike started Monday August 11 after a three day warning strike given as far back as June. The unions are demanding outstanding promotion arrears.

The industrial action by JOHESU takes place alongside the five week old National Medical Association ongoing strike that has paralyzed

Nigerian hospitals. Consultant physicians were providing a skeleton service. A spokesperson for the Joint Health Sector unions said the strike was made inevitable when it was proved that promotion arrears and outstanding allowances were being paid in other Federal Medical Centre's. The chief medical director at the Yenagoa FMC said outstanding arrears were being delayed as a consequence of funding shortfall.

#### **Namibian diamond miners' strike continues**

The strike at Namdeb, the Namibian mining company, by the Namibian Union of Miners continues as the company takes legal action. The company has gone to the courts to force workers to carry out mine safety work, which the unions have not opposed. Out of the 745 workers on strike, 112 have returned to work as the strike reached its tenth day on Monday 11 August. The company's latest offer is of a three year deal comprising a 9.5 percent wage increase this year and inflation plus one percent in the next two years.

Namdeb wanted the three year deal with a no-strike agreement. The NUM wants inflation plus three percent over the three years, or a 9.5 percent per year across the board over the same period. There are also issues of health and housing still to be agreed.



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