

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

29 August 2014

## Europe

### Norwegian teachers continue strike

Thousands of Norwegian teachers are striking, in an ongoing dispute as the new school term begins. The teachers, members of the Union of Education Norway (UEN), are protesting plans by municipal authorities to change their work hours and conditions. The changes include forcing teachers to spend a minimum of 7.5 hours on school premises, abolishing limits on the number of hours for instruction and the abolition of time to prepare, plan and assess pupils' work.

The number of teachers involved in the strike has grown over the course of the dispute, which began at one school in June. Next Tuesday 9,000 teachers are set to strike. Earlier this week, the UEN announced the walkouts will include a further 850 teachers from 31 schools in five more municipalities. The schools are in Kongsvinger, Nøtterøy, Randaberg, Orkdal and Østre Toten.

The calling out of more teachers follows a breakdown in talks with the KS employers' organisation. Last May, teachers rejected, by a two-thirds majority, an agreement backed by the union.

### Strike by Irish Rail workers

Members of the National Bus & Rail Union (NBRU) working for Irish Rail conducted a 48-hour strike on August 24 whilst those in the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) walked out for 24 hours Monday.

The strikes follow the breakdown of 18 months of talks with management. Irish Rail has implemented pay cuts of between 1.7 percent and 6 percent. Three other unions have already accepted these cuts.

The unions have planned three more days of strike action next month. Currently there are no plans for further negotiations between the unions and Irish Rail management.

### Care staff in Doncaster, England in renewed strike

Around 70 care staff, looking after people with learning disabilities in their own homes, began a three-week strike Monday. The workers had previously been employed by the NHS but are now employed by Care UK, which is owned by a hedge fund management firm. They are members of the Unison union.

The caregivers have already carried out 48 days of strikes since February. In the current dispute they are seeking an increase in basic pay of £7 an hour to the so-called living wage figure of £7.65 an hour. The previous dispute, to oppose cuts in pay through the abolition of enhancements for out of hours and weekend work, was

conceded by the union, with the company achieving most of the changes it was seeking.

### Planned strike by Spanish airport staff

Staff at Madrid airport who originally planned to strike between August 15 and August 17 will now walk out on August 29 for three days. The employees are members of the CGT-Aena union. They are opposing the government's plans to sell 49 percent of the shares of the state-owned company.

Those involved in the proposed action include security staff, fire fighters and baggage handlers. They fear the sell-off of shares will lead to job losses and undermine conditions at the airport.

### UK health workers in Unite union to vote strike

Thousands of health workers employed by the National Health Service (NHS), members of the Unite trade union, are being balloted this week on possible strike action in the autumn in response to a derisory pay offer by the government.

The ballot covers workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. NHS staff in Scotland will not be included in the ballot, as the devolved Scottish government agreed to pay the across-the-board one percent rise with small additions to those on low pay, which Unite accepted.

Jeremy Hunt, the government health secretary, vetoed a recommendation by the independent Pay Review Body (PRB) of a one percent pay rise to all NHS staff and instead only offered the one percent rise to staff at the top of their pay grade. It is estimated that around 1.3 million NHS workers have suffered a 15 percent loss in real pay since the coalition government came to power in 2010.

## Middle East

### Egyptian textile workers strike at six factories

Around 2,000 textile operatives employed by Misr-Iran in their six plants in Cairo went on strike at the end of last week, bringing production to a halt.

Promised profit bonuses and a pay rise due to come into effect in June have been postponed until September. The company has also reportedly stopped providing transport for workers to their plants.

### Egyptian doctors plan protest over non-payment of dues

The Egyptian doctors' syndicate plans to hold a demonstration on August 29 to protest the non-payment of dues by the Ministry

of Health.

The doctors ended a two-month strike in May when legislation was passed authorizing the payments of the money the government owes them. However, the payments have still not been made. The doctors are also considering other avenues, including legal and strike action.

#### **Striking Iranian iron ore miners arrested**

Five striking miners from the Bafgh iron ore mine in Iran were arrested last Saturday. They began their strike at the beginning of the week to protest the arrest of 18 labour activists who opposed government plans to privatize the mine.

#### **Jordanian teachers strike as new school year begins**

Teachers belonging to the Jordanian Teachers Association came out on strike on Sunday, the first day of the new school year. The union stated that 85 percent of their members took part in the action.

They are demanding a salary increase, increased sick pay, career progression and an enhanced medical insurance scheme.

#### **Striking Lebanese contract workers threatened by Energy Minister**

Some 2,000 contract workers are striking the electricity supply company Electricite du Liban (EDL) to demand that they be hired as full-time, permanent staff. To date only around 900 of the workers have been offered permanent status.

The Lebanese Energy Minister is demanding the workers stop picketing EDL premises, stop preventing regular EDL staff from entering and other forms of protest, or face a security forces crackdown.

#### **Israeli beach lifeguards in Haifa in sick out protest**

Last Friday lifeguards employed to patrol the beaches at Haifa staged a mass sick call-in over a dispute with their employer. Talks between the Histadrut labour federation and the Ministry of Finance were arranged to attempt to settle the dispute. Swimmers were advised to stay out of the water for their own safety.

## **Africa**

#### **Nigerian medics call off long-running strike [/subhead**

The Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) called off its 55-day-old strike on August 25 on the promise from the Senate president that he will meet their demands.

The NMA went on strike demanding a N100,000 (\$617) hazard allowance for doctors, clinical duty allowance for honorary consultants and ending the recognition of non-medical doctors as directors and consultants.

The NMA also called for the reinstatement of 16,000 resident doctors terminated by Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan in response to the Resident Doctors Associations strike.

#### **Nigerian judicial workers may resume strike**

The Nigerian judiciary workers are threatening to return to strike action in response to the Federal Accounts Allocations Committee (FAAC) reneging on a memorandum of understanding.

The Judiciary Staff Union of Nigerian (JUSUN) is demanding

that FAAC respects the constitution and makes judicial funds a first in line charge. The government is claiming a reduction in oil revenues from Shell operations and the decline in Company Income Tax as reason for the non-implementation of the unions' demands.

#### **South African platinum miners face job cuts[/subhead]**

South African Platinum mining company Lonmin is planning to cut 5,700 jobs in its operations around Marikana in Rustenburg. The three unions representing members in the platinum industry, of which the largest is the Association of Mining and Construction Union (AMCU), plus the National Union of Miners (NUM) and Solidarity, said they had not been informed by the company of the job losses but learned of them through the media.

AMCU said it was not surprised and that these job losses were on the agenda before their recent five-month strike. The union's president Joseph Mathunjwa had no proposal to resist the job destruction, saying, "As a union we are prepared to discuss the plans of the company to protect the position of our members in the transition period".

#### **Kenyan public hospital doctors strike to demand unpaid wages**

Doctors in Kenya's public hospitals are on strike in response to unpaid wages throughout the country. Other workers are expected to join the strike soon. The Kenyan state government declared they have no cash to pay wages because of the lack of the disbursement of funds this year.

Some counties in Kenya are without water and electricity and other service providers are terminating their services. Some counties have resorted to taking out bank loans to continue a measure of services.

#### **Kenyan nurses sacked by county government**

Nurses working on a contract for the Uasin Gishu county government have been sacked, with the government claiming the health care workers had not signed evaluation forms two months ago. The 100 nurses worked for the central government prior to being dispersed to the counties.

The Kenyan National Union of Nurses has threatened to strike from September 3 unless the nurses are reinstated. According to the union, the county chief officer of health has no right to sign termination notices.



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