

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

6 February 2015

Europe

Strike by Polish miners widens

Last week, around 25,000 miners working for the Jastrzebska Spolka Weglowa (JSW) group went on strike over attempts by the company to tie a pay rise and bonuses to profit levels. They were also opposing the sacking of 10 miners at the JSW mine at Budryk for organising a protest in January.

They were joined on Monday by miners employed by Poland's largest coal producer, Kompania Weglowa (KW), when 49,000 employed at the 14 KW mines came out in sympathy.

Talks between the Solidarity union and JSW have failed to resolve the dispute.

London bus drivers in 24-hour strike

London's 27,000 bus drivers took a 24-hour strike on Thursday. They are members of the Unite union. The action follows a similar 24-hour strike in January. Further 24-hour strikes are planned for February 13 and 16.

Currently, bus drivers across London are employed by 18 different companies with varying pay rates and conditions. They are seeking uniform pay and conditions. Pay for drivers can differ by up to £3 (\$4.6) an hour.

German metal workers strike in pay campaign

Around 165,000 metal workers, members of the IG Metall union at nearly 800 companies, struck last week. The workers are seeking a pay increase.

IG Metall is calling for a 5.5 percent increase for the year 2015 backdated to the beginning of the year. The employers have offered a 2.2 percent increase from March 1 and want to water down the rights to partial retirement for older workers in the years leading up to retirement.

IG Metall and employers' representatives have held two rounds of negotiations, with a third scheduled for today.

Italian bank staff national strike

Around 30,000 bank staff held a one-day strike last Friday over their employers' organisation, the Italian Banking Association's (ABI), decision to annul its national collective bargaining contract. The strike was organised by the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL).

Rallies took place in several Italian cities including Rome, Milan, Palermo and Ravenna. CGIL leader Susanna Camusso told the press, "If ABI doesn't change its mind, we'll continue our protests and strikes."

Top banking executives in Italy earn over three million euro (\$3.4m) a year plus bonuses, compared to the average annual salary of a bank worker of 40,000 euro (\$45,600).

Irish nurses protest overcrowding

Nurses represented by the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) at the Midlands Regional Hospital in Mullingar held a lunchtime protest last week. They were calling for more staff and beds to end overcrowding at the hospital.

The union will begin balloting for a work-to-rule next week.

Turkish workers protest strike postponement

A strike by Turkish metal workers launched on January 29 has been stymied by a decision of the Turkish cabinet to postpone the strike for 60 days. Under the legislation, strikes deemed to be a risk to national security can be postponed for 60 days. Such a postponement usually means an indefinite ban.

Workers at 22 factories in 10 cities belonging to the Birlesik Metal-Isat union launched the strike after failing to reach an agreement with the employers' body, the Metal Industrialists' Union (MESS). The planned strike was against the retention of a cheap labour mechanism which imposes low wages on the majority of the workforce.

Workers protesting the cabinet's postponement of the strike met in Kizilay Square in Ankara on Sunday. Police arrested some of the protesters.

Middle East

Strike at Iran pipe factory

Around 1,000 employees at the Safa Pipe factory came out on strike Sunday, protesting management's failure to pay the second installment of their back pay due January 30. The members of the Free Union of Iranian Workers held a strike last month over the same issue. Following the previous strike, the Saveh City Council ordered the employees be given one month's pay January 11, January 30, February 28 and March 16, together with a special New Year bonus to be paid March 20.

They came out on strike after the company failed to keep to the payment schedule.

Israeli chemical workers strike against layoffs

Around 850 chemical workers under the auspices of the Histadrut union organisation, working for the bromine plant of Israel Chemicals (ICL) at their Neot Hovav site as well as the company headquarters at Beersheba, began a strike Monday. This follows the issuing of dismissal letters to 140 workers at the plant. ICL is in the process of restructuring its organisation which will include some jobs going abroad.

Histadrut issued the strike call after trying to negotiate a compromise deal which would have offered early retirement to 70 of the staff.

Africa

South African transport strike

Transport workers in Pretoria, Gauteng, went on strike Monday. The South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) presented the Rea Vaya Bus Rapid Transport System Company an undisclosed list of demands.

With the bus service at a complete standstill, other companies have been asked to step in to minimise the impact of the strike. Rea Vaya has threatened drivers with suspension.

There is also a strike in Cape Town at MyCiti buses. According to the South African Transport Workers Union (SATWU), they are protesting unfair dismissals, seeking improved working conditions and the right to organise as a trade union.

Kenyan teachers protest terror threat

Around 700 Kenyan teachers working in schools bordering Somalia, in the north of the country, have refused to return to work. They travelled to Nairobi to demonstrate outside parliament. They are demanding relocation away from the border, which is under continuous threats from Al Shabab, the Islamist extremist organisation operating out of Somalia.

In November, 28 passengers travelling on a bus in northern Kenya were separated and killed by Al Shabab, 22 of whom were teachers. A further attack on quarry workers in the area left 38 dead. The teachers have only recently returned to work after a national strike over unpaid wages in January.

Malawi parliamentary staff sit-in

Striking parliamentary workers in Malawi began a sit-in Tuesday, demanding the payment of an agreed 24 percent pay rise. They are angry because an 18 percent pay increase was imposed on them, even after the original claim was reduced from 45 percent.

The Parliamentary Staff Union spokesperson said their colleagues in the mainstream civil service had been paid a 45 percent increase. The workers have not had a pay increase for the last six years. It is the first time parliamentary support staff has taken strike action, resulting in the suspension of its activities.

Strike of oil workers in Niger

Oil workers at the only refinery in Niger, in the town of Zinder, went on strike for the third time in less than two weeks January 29. The plant resumed work January 15, after a maintenance break, and the initial strike took place a week later.

Their demands include more equitable pay and conditions between Nigerien and Chinese staff.

The refinery is a joint venture between the Nigerien government and the Chinese government-owned China National Petroleum Company. The first strike lasted two days, the second three, and the third four days. The workers produce 20,000 barrels of oil a day.

The Nigerien workers' union says Chinese workers are paid 10 times more for an equal amount of work. The union continued to provide a limited service up to the end of the third strike, with 30 loaded trucks leaving the refinery each day, as opposed to the 80 in normal full production.

Zambian miners sacked after strike

Zambia's Klumbila Minerals Ltd, owned by First Quantum Mines, fired 11 striking miners in spite of promising the government there would be no reprisals on their return to work.

A strike of 3,000 miners took place at the beginning of January, after an injured miner was left untreated in the company's treatment room and subsequently died. They were further angered by the company's refusal of a funeral grant. The strike, which escalated into a demand by the Zambian Union of Mineworkers for a substantial pay increase, lasted two days. They returned to work on the promise of future negotiations.

First Quantum is one of the largest mines in the world.

Zimbabwean rail workers strike

Railway workers in Zimbabwe have gone on strike, demanding nine months unpaid wages. Zimbabwe Amalgamated Workers Union representatives failed in an attempt to speak to National Railway of Zimbabwe managers.

Train operators have only been getting around 20 percent of their wages, in the region of \$40 to \$80 a month, depending on their grades. Management claims shortage of revenues on the basis of the slowness of business and the current economic environment. According to management, the railway was shifting 18 million tons of goods per year in 1998, but only 3.6 million tons in 2013, rising to six million tons in the

last year, with a system designed to transport 80 million tons per annum.

Namibian manganese miners strike

Four hundred workers at the Purity Manganese mine in Namibia have gone on strike, declaring they will not return to work until their wages are paid in full. Out of the 400 workers, 30 received no pay at all while the rest received only half pay. They have not been paid since December.

Police were called to the mine when the miners refused to leave and the usual cover by an outside security company had been discontinued. Trade union representation at the company has been barred.



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