

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

27 February 2015

Europe

## Firefighters in England stage 24-hour walkout

English firefighters began a 24-hour walkout at 7 am on Wednesday. It is the latest in a long-running series of industrial action in opposition to pension changes that will mean firefighters having to work longer, pay higher contributions and receive less in benefits.

In addition, many firefighters fear that having to work longer will mean they are likely to fail the compulsory fitness tests when they reach 55 and so have to leave the service before being able to draw their pensions.

## UK highway maintenance staff continue action

Workers employed by the highways maintenance company, Amery, held a fourth 24-hour strike on Monday and plan to hold a seven-day strike beginning March 2. They are seeking a five percent pay rise. Amery's offer falls short of this figure.

The company is also seeking to dismantle collective bargaining for new starters. Under company proposals new starters would have their pay determined year on year by company directors.

## UK television staff to ballot over pay

Staff at the UK commercial television broadcaster ITV are to ballot on strike action after they rejected the company's two percent pay offer. Last week the National Union of Journalists, Unite and the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union (Bectu) met for talks under the auspices of the government conciliation service Acas, but were not able to reach an agreement.

Indicative votes by the three unions on balloting for strike action were all in the 80 percent region. It was recently revealed that ITV CEO Adam Crozier was paid £8.4 million last year.

## Teachers strike at Welsh school

Teachers at a secondary school in the Welsh town of Aberystwyth began

a three-day strike Tuesday. The 23 teachers are members of the NASUWT union. The action is in opposition to disciplinary procedures and the demands of a growing workload.

## Irish children detention staff hold one-hour stoppage

Staff at the national children detention centre in Oberstown held a one-hour stoppage on Monday. The staff, members of the Impact trade union, are demanding the introduction of an injury and assault leave scheme for those who get injured in the course of their work.

## Rally of Irish firefighters opposes staff cuts

Around 700 firefighters attended a rally outside government buildings in Dublin on Tuesday against staffing cuts. They are members of the public sector Siptu trade union, which represents 3,000 firefighters nation-wide.

Siptu is currently balloting retained (part-time) firefighters on possible industrial action against government proposals which would see retained firefighter numbers cut by a third.

## Action by Danish airport baggage handlers

Baggage handlers working for Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) at Copenhagen Airport went on strike Tuesday, leading to flight delays. The strike was over dissatisfaction with an agreement signed between the union and SAS management and was the third strike since summer last year.

## Portuguese underground workers strike

Staff working for the Lisbon Metro were holding 18-hour strikes Tuesday and Friday of this week in opposition to plans to sell off the state-owned service to the private sector and over poor conditions.

## Finnish airport staff face job cuts

Aviator Finland, which provides airport services at the Helsinki-Vantaa airport, has announced it will cut 100 jobs out of its workforce of 370. This follows the company losing a contract with its biggest customer the budget airline, Norwegian. The union IAU said it is currently considering what action to take in the light of the job losses.

### **German IG Metall union settles pay claim**

The IG Metall representing nearly four million workers, mainly in automobile and machinery production have settled their pay claim following talks with employers' representatives in Baden-Wuerttemberg state. The deal is expected to be taken up in the rest of the country.

IG Metall members will receive a 3.4 percent pay increase from April 1. They will also get a one-off payment of 150 euros to cover the period January to March.

The union had initially put in a demand for a 5.5 percent pay rise backdated to the beginning of the year.

### **Turkish health workers attacked by police**

Ninety-eight workers at Maltepe University, fired last December after joining a union and demanding higher wages and shorter working hours, were brutally confronted by police Tuesday when they attempted to enter the hospital in the course of a protest. According to the DISK union, two workers were injured and a further 34 were arrested.

Middle East

### **Solidarity support for Israeli chemical workers**

The strike by Israeli Chemical Ltd (ICL) staff continues. They are opposing plans by the company to make 140 employees at its Bromine Compounds unit redundant.

There is widespread anger that ICL management has summonsed the workers due to be laid off by attaching notices on the front doors of their homes, telling them to appear at pre-layoff hearings.

On Monday residents of the city of Arad in southern Israel blocked roads leading into the city and Arad city municipal workers held a strike in support of the chemical employees.

Histadrut, the Israeli general federation of labour, has threatened to call for a general work dispute in the south of Israel if the layoffs go ahead.

### **Strike by Palestinian workers in West Bank for union recognition**

Last week around 20 Palestinian workers employed by M S Aluminium in East Jerusalem held a two-hour strike outside the gates of the company. The strike was in response to the company's refusal to recognize the WAC-MAAN union to which most of the works belong and the company's refusal to discuss with the union on a plant-wide collective agreement.

### **UAE migrant workers die in fire**

Last week at least 10 migrant workers were killed and a similar number injured when a fire swept through their illegal accommodation. The fire is thought to have begun in a car repair shop and quickly spread to the two-storey warehouse where the migrant labourers were sleeping.

The warehouse where the migrant labourers were illegally accommodated is in the al- Mussafah district of Abu Dhabi, an area on the outskirts of the capital populated with warehouses, factories and workshops.

Migrant workers, many from South Asia, suffer many abuses including confiscation of passports, terrible living conditions and suffer injury and death on unsafe building sites. The warehouse had been illegally rented out to the labourers as living accommodation.

Africa

### **Nigerian Polytechnics called to resume action**

Nigerian polytechnic academic staff, members of the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP), threatened to resume strike action on Tuesday after a three-month suspension of the action came to an end. The original nine-month strike was called off after a newly appointed education minister promised to resolve the issues.

The central issues were the implementation of CONTISS 15 (a wage and conditions restructuring agreement), which the government had agreed to in 2009. Other unions are likely to join the strike

### **Bus drivers in Johannesburg South Africa continue strike**

A strike at the Johannesburg bus operator, Piotrans, is now in its fourth week. Over 60 percent of the drivers were sacked for taking wildcat action. Piotrans is recruiting workers to take up their positions. The strikers are affiliated to the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) and took action over shift and salary disagreements and union representation.

SAMWU does not come under the umbrella of the SA Road Passenger Bargaining Council, the industry negotiating body, but the company says it recognises the union. SAMWU accuses the bus company of negotiating with labour brokers associated with Litsamaiso, the outgoing operating company, and not going through the union. The bus workers took strike action in 2014 that included opposition to labour agency employment.

### **Protest by South African coal miners**

South African miners, members of the National Union of Miners (NUM), embarked on a protest march last Saturday to oppose the closure of Optimum Coal Mine in Mpumalanga. The NUM said it had not been given notice of the closure.

The march was to the offices of Glenco Mining at Middleburg in the town of Mpumalanga. The union claims that around 1,000 permanent employees and 500 contractors will lose their jobs. The NUM called on miners in the surrounding area to join the demonstration.

## **Zambian copper miners walk off the job**

Miners at the Lumwana copper mine, owned by the Barrack Gold Zambia Company, have gone on strike after the company announced it will close the mine, leading to 2,000 job losses.

The company said it was closing the mine after the Zambian government increased mining royalties from six percent to 20 percent.

Miners are demanding to know what will happen to them. Many had taken out loans on long contracts. They are demanding the company pays larger compensation on the basis of a breach of contract, rather than redundancy pay.

The closure threatens up to 4,000 direct jobs and a projection by Zambia Chamber of Commerce is that 12,000 jobs are threatened by the royalties increase.



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