

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

6 March 2015

Rolling strikes by German teachers

Teachers organised by the GEW trade union began a programme of rolling strikes, starting in Berlin on Tuesday. The action is scheduled to spread to other parts of Germany, with different parts of the country being affected next week.

The teachers are protesting lower pay rates in former East Germany areas and for those with foreign teaching qualifications, planned cuts in pension entitlement and lack of negotiating rights over pay scales that are unilaterally determined by employers.

As well as teachers, some education support staff took part. German teachers are divided between those considered as civil servants (Beamte) who are the majority and currently enjoy better conditions and greater employment security than the remaining teachers, known as Angestellte. Under current legislation, in lieu of their enhanced employment conditions, Beamte teachers are not allowed to strike. This is undergoing a legal challenge promoted by the GEW union.

Strike by German bank staff

Bank staff working for Deutsche Bank's subsidiary Postbank held a one-day strike Monday. The staff, members of the Verdi union, are seeking a 5 percent pay increase, a guarantee of job security until 2020 and other demands. Talks between the union and Deutsche Bank began in Bonn on Wednesday.

Deutsche Bank is seeking to sell Postbank in an effort to increase profitability.

Italian credit union staff strike

A strike by workers at the Italian credit cooperative BCC on Monday had overwhelming support. Members of five different unions took the action following the decision by the national association of credit unions organisation, Federcasse, to unilaterally end collective bargaining contracts. The contracts apply to national and regional terms of employment and conditions.

Italian port workers strike

Ports across Italy were due to be hit by strikes today. The Filt-CGIL, Filt-CISL and Uiltrasporti unions called the action to oppose "reforms" being pushed by the transport and economic development ministries. The strike was due to last 24 hours.

French rail workers to strike

French rail workers are to strike from 7 p.m. on March 9 until 8 a.m. on March 11. The action, organised by the CGT union, is to protest the merger of the SNCF train operator employees and RFF railway network staff into one organisation. The merger went ahead in January following government legislation aimed at opening up the railway service to privatisation.

Railworkers mounted a series of strikes last year in the run-up to the legislation being passed in the French parliament.

Norwegian pilot strike

Pilots employed by Norwegian Air began a strike on February 28 when 70 walked out. A further 600 pilots joined the action on March 4.

The strike follows three months of unproductive negotiations over pay and conditions. The company has threatened to file for bankruptcy to end the strike, which has already led to thousands of passengers being stranded.

Norwegian Air is Scandinavia's third-largest budget airline, employing around 4,500 staff. Its parent company is Norwegian Air Shuttle.

Four-day strike of Danish air cabin crew ends

The four-day strike by around 1,300 cabin crew working for SAS airlines in Denmark ended on Monday. SAS issued an ultimatum that if they did not return to work they would be sacked.

The stoppage led to the cancellation of around 100 flights. The dispute began after SAS's attempt to transfer some of their cabin crew to a cheaper collective bargaining agreement that pertains to Cimber airlines, recently acquired by SAS. The dispute will be taken up by the Danish Labour Court.

UK London borough refuse workers vote to strike

Refuse lorry drivers employed by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham voted to strike after the council threatened to cut their pay by over £1,000.

According to the *Barking and Dagenham Post*, “the 30-minute safety check workers are paid to carry out before each shift has been halved in length, leading to the wage drop.”

There was a 90 percent turnout in the ballot organised by the GMB union.

Cypriot power workers ready to fight privatisation

Electricity Authority of Cyprus (EAC) staff have voted to fight Cypriot government plans to privatise EAC. Votes at several regional gatherings of EAC unions have registered majorities of between 95 and 98 percent in favour of carrying out “dynamic measures” including striking if the government goes ahead with its privatisation plans.

EAC is slated for privatisation, along with the Cyprus Telecommunications Authority and Cyprus Ports Authority. The privatisation is being pushed through to pay off a €10 billion international bailout.

Protest in support of Israeli chemical workers

Around 2,500 demonstrated outside the residence of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem on Sunday in support of the 140 staff threatened with redundancy at the ICL Bromide Compounds plant near the Dead Sea. A further 135 jobs are also under threat. The protest was organised by the Histadrut trade union federation.

Talks between Histadrut and Israeli Chemicals

Negotiations between Israeli Chemicals and the Histadrut trade union federation began Tuesday, following the intervention of National Infrastructure Energy and Water Minister Silvan Shalom.

There is wide support for the chemical workers in south Israel, which has high levels of unemployment. Local government workers have held sympathy strikes and protesters have blocked highways. Histadrut declared a general strike in southern Israel, which will come into effect next week following a statutory notice of two weeks. The federation called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to intervene in the dispute.

Oman postal workers strike to oppose privatisation

Over 600 workers employed by *Oman Post* began a strike on March 1 to protest the government’s plans to privatise the service. The strike affected 95 post offices across Oman.

Strike of West Bank teachers

Teachers in the Nablus and Salfeet districts of the West Bank held a strike on Monday to protest the withholding of tax revenues due to the Palestinian Authority by the Israeli government. This withholding of revenues means teachers, along with other civil servants, are receiving less than the full amount of their salaries (about 60 percent of wages due).

Tunisian secondary teachers strike

Secondary school teachers in Tunisia have been on strike this week, demanding more funding for education, including salaries. Public spending, including education, is facing cutbacks as the government attempts to carry through International Monetary Fund-imposed conditions. The strike was timed to coincide with national school examinations.

Iranian teachers hold nationwide demonstrations

Teachers across Iran held protests outside local education ministry offices on Sunday, including in Tehran. They were protesting low wages, which are under the poverty level. They were also demanding higher budgets for education provision. Two weeks ago, a petition signed by 6,000 teachers demanding a review of wages was submitted to parliament.

Jordanian newspaper staff protest unpaid wages

Journalists and other staff employed by the Jordanian daily *Ad Dustour* held a one-hour strike last Saturday to pressure the company to pay them outstanding salaries. The protest was supported by the Jordan Press Association.

South African road staff strike

Workers at Johannesburg Road Agency, South Africa, struck this week after giving management notification last Friday. They are responsible for traffic light repairs and road surface maintenance and are members of South African Municipal Workers Union.

The workers are demanding the introduction of a pay progression system, a one-off salary adjustment, the increase in travelling allowances for inspectors from R4,500 (US\$3,820) to R8,500 (US\$7,215) and the sacking of the depot manager in the F region.

Mauritanian iron ore miners continue strike

Mauritanian miners at the National Industrial Mining Company, the

state-owned iron ore mine, have been striking since January 28 demanding the company honours an agreed wage deal. A General Confederation of Workers spokesman said 90 percent of its members are supporting the strike.

The mining company exports 80 percent of the 12 million tons of iron ore it produces to China, with the remainder going to Europe. The World Bank estimates production will rise this year to 18 million tons.

Malawi teachers strike for back pay

Malawi primary school teachers have gone on strike in the Karonga area demanding their back pay. Trainee teachers in Lilongwe, the capital city, had not been paid for five months.

Children as young as nine years old demonstrated in support of the teachers. According to the teachersolidarity web site, the “strike is affecting 9,000 students—meaning that the average class size must be approximately 130 children.”

Teachers who started in the job last September are leaving their posts, saying they are unable to live on the \$50 a month pay and cannot feed themselves.

Liberian beach staff demonstrate over non-payment of wages

Workers responsible for keeping Liberian beaches clean demonstrated at the Capitol Building March 3, demanding payment of outstanding wages. The workers are employed by the Liberian State Maritime Project and have not been paid for eight months.

The cleaning workers have sent their grievances to Monrovia’s state legislator. A request, addressed to the minister of justice on February 23 to intervene on their behalf, received no response.

Protest by cement contract workers in Zambia

Two hundred contract workers went on strike at the Dangote Cement Company, Zambia, on March 1, protesting their dismissal while new workers were being hired in. The workers from three subcontractors say they have been with the company since 2011, involved in the construction of the cement plant.

They are angry that after four years work they are being sidelined and complain that they had to pay for their own protective clothing. They were denied privileges such as support for lunch and travel allowances.

The owner of Dangote is on the Forbes rich list as Africa’s richest man, with a \$14 billion fortune made through cement production.



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